Raymond Williams, Cultural Materialism and the Break-Up of Britain

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A submission presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Glamorgan / Prifysgol Morgannwg for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 2006

Contents

Abstract

This thesis re-examines the writing of Raymond Williams. It has two goals. Firstly, it explores Williams's concept of cultural materialism, which theorises the role played by cultural forms in the creation and contestation of a national political order. Secondly, it extrapolates Williams's implicit critique of the unitary British state, and his theory of how cultural forms relate to that state.

In Chapter One, I argue that Williams developed his theory of culture by combining a theoretical critique of national literary traditions with an interest in the emergent drama of nineteenth-century Scandinavia and twentieth-century Ireland and Wales. This theme is developed in Chapter Two, where I suggest that certain cultural and political experiences in Wales helped Williams to develop a cultural theory that was more generally applicable.

Central to Williams's political aspirations was an attempt to expand and democratise the education system. In Chapter Three, I argue that Williams's novels can be understood as university fiction, providing examples of the kind of university he wished to develop. Since universities arose as institutions generating a sense of unified national culture during the imperial period, to re-think the work of the university is also to re-think the political make-up of the nation.

This theme is expanded in Chapter Four, where I argue that Williams related the break-up of the British empire to the break-up of the British state, via devolution in Scotland and Wales. Williams theorised the part played by fiction and other cultural forms in enabling those nations to develop their own voices. He also showed that fiction could provide an imaginative critique of the unitary British state from a series of other perspectives, notably feminism and ethnic subcultures. Finally, in Chapter Five I argue that Raymond Williams can be understood as a film theorist, and demonstrate that a similar renegotiation of British identities occurs in contemporary film.

An interest in the political make-up of the British state, and an attempt to develop alternative political and cultural formations, spanned Williams's career. This aspect of his work has hitherto received little critical attention. By discussing Williams in relation to the political break-up of Britain, this thesis makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the Williams oeuvre.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I wish to thank Professor Jane Aaron and Doctor Jeff Wallace at the University of Glamorgan for giving me the opportunity to undertake the research which led to the writing of this thesis. Both of them have been extremely generous in their time and in their criticism of early drafts of the project.

Other friends and colleagues who made the University of Glamorgan a stimulating and supportive environment in which to carry out research were Steve Blandford, Gavin Edwards, Claire Flay, Diana Wallace, Alyn Webley and Martin Willis.

I am grateful to Professor Dai Smith, currently of the University of Wales, Swansea, for giving me the opportunity to view certain Raymond Williams manuscripts first-hand, and for taking the time to comment on early versions of some of this work.

I would like to thank Mina Ishizu for sharing with me numerous intellectual conversations during the period in which the thesis was written, on subjects ranging from Indian cinema to bilingual education; and from media advertising to international football. Although none of these topics is addressed directly in the thesis, I am sure that each of these conversations helped me to develop a capacity for serious thought.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, Lesley Dix, Andrew Dix and Gareth Dix for showing an enthusiastic and encouraging attitude throughout the period of research. In a real sense, my first experiences of crossing the many different internal borders of the United Kingdom were provided by my grandfather Leslie Davies. It saddens me more than I can say that he did not survive to see this project completed.

List of Illustrations

List of Abbreviations

All of the abbreviations refer to books published by Raymond Williams. A full bibliographic entry is provided the first time each book is referred to in the text. Thereafter, the following abbreviations are used:

BC *Border Country* (1960)
C *Culture* (1981)
CC *The Country and the City* (1973)
Co *Communications* (3rd edition, 1976)
CS *Culture and Society* (1958)
DIB *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* (1968)
DIE *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* (1952)
EN *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (1970)
FM *The Fight for Manod* (1979)
L *Loyalties* (1985)
LR *The Long Revolution* (1961)
ML *Marxism and Literature* (1977)
O *Orwell* (1971)
PF *Preface to Film* (1954)
PL *Politics and Letters* (1979)
PM *The Politics of Modernism* (1989)
PMC *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (1980)
RH *Resources of Hope* (1988)
SG *Second Generation* (1984)
T *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1974)
T2000 *Towards 2000* (1983)
V *The Volunteers* (1978)
WCS *What I Came to Say* (1989)
WS *Writing in Society* (1984)
WSW *Who Speaks for Wales?* (2003)

Introduction: Williams and Modernity

Raymond Williams (1921-88) remains the pre-eminent Welsh literary, social and cultural critic. As well as being Professor of Drama at the University of Cambridge, he was a socialist political activist, and a novelist. Williams did not regard these strands of work as separate from each other. Although he admitted that his primary interest was in writing, this was never conceived of as some kind of isolated practice, undertaken in retreat from the pressures of contemporary life. On the contrary, Williams was interested in how writing participates in society and is therefore an inextricable part of much wider social and material processes. One of the most striking features of the Williams oeuvre is the consistency of his thought. His commitment to a fully developed participating democracy is everywhere in evidence, whether he is writing about the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament or the Women's Liberation Movement, academic institutions or the post-industrial future of the Welsh valleys.

Raymond Williams developed cultural materialism as a Marxist theory of culture. He argued that cultural products are not simple reflections of the social order; they also participate actively in the formation or renegotiation of that order. Cultural forms – particularly writing - do not simply follow on from events in the world, they also actively play a part in enabling those events to happen.

The text in which Williams most succinctly propounded the central themes of cultural materialism was *The Country and The City* (1973). As an example of how writing plays an active part in social and historical processes, *The Country and The City* shows us how English literature became involved with a putative national tradition throughout the period of modernisation, from about 1550 (the early modern period) to about 1880 (the period of high nationalism and imperialism).

Williams in *The Country and The City* looks at the tradition of country house writing, and probes its role in idealising the social order of early capitalist Britain. Texts such as Shakespeare's *The Tempest* or *Henry V,* or Jonson's *To Penshurst* are seen to be both cause and effect of the political power of the social order. They play a specific part in the creation of a poetics of nationhood, and in the last instance, in the creation of empire. In other words, *The Country and The City* draws a connection between the processes of nation-building at home and of empire-building overseas.

The conjunction Williams makes is between the creation of *nation* and the creation of *empire*. Implicitly then, the break-up of empire should be related to an accompanying break-up of the nation-state itself. The argument I wish to put throughout this thesis is as follows. Williams emphasised the fact that nationhood had originally been imagined into existence in part through its literature and cultural forms. Accordingly, to produce a different kind of literature is to imagine a different kind of nation.

That is the general trajectory of Williams's career. He began with an early interest in the process of modernisation, and in the related processes of capitalism and imperialism. He then developed an interest in how the nation can be rethought, in a way that would avoid these constructs. Late in his career, Williams began advocating self-rule in Scotland and Wales, and – crucially – in the English regions. This is part of the long revolution towards finding democratic processes. Cultural materialism is a theory capable of explaining the part played by cultural forms in contributing to these historical developments.

The movement of this thesis is therefore away from Williams's emphasis on the nation-state and its process of modernisation. It is towards a postmodern concept of the nation which must also therefore be in some way post-national. I will argue that although Williams did not survive to witness the moment of devolution in 1997, this in no way lessens the impact of his writing. He had anticipated the break-up of Britain long before it began to occur. The process of political break-up itself is still ongoing, with a result that Williams is a major figure in our understanding of contemporary postcolonial British cultures. In order to understand precisely how the theory of cultural materialism can be used to shed light on the process of political break-up in Britain, it is necessary to examine the ways in which Williams understands the history of the British state.

Williams, Nation-State and Modernity

To Williams, the nation-state was fundamentally an organ of cultural and political modernity. He suggested that the development from *nation* to *state* is analogous with the whole history of modernity. This draws in all sorts of related histories, from the development of technologies of transport and communication, to the experience of

rapid urbanisation; and from the development of political and economic institutions to modernist cultural forms such as the newspaper, the novel, and the cinema. Modernisation is the term by which Williams understands these and a myriad other developments. Their sum-total is the modern nation-state.

The term *nation* has implications of a people, rather than of a state as such. The organisation of a nation of people into a political *state* was heavily dependent on two factors: the developing technologies of transport and communication; and an element of consciously willed political association – usually carried out by a ruling or powerful elite. Williams draws attention to this drift when he writes:

> A *nation* once was unproblematic, with its strong connections with the fact of birth, the fact that a nation was a group of people who shared a *native* land. This meaning was overridden but never destroyed, by the development of the *nation-state*, in which what really matters is not common birth or the sharing of native land, but a specific independent kind of political organization.[1]

Williams here refers to the element of consciously willed political organization which was crucial in the development of the modern nation-state. The state became assembled as a consciously sought institution some time between the early modern period (around 1550) and the late nineteenth century (the period of high imperialism). Throughout that period, a greater and greater number of people were brought within the domain of the organized nation-state.

This mediation between impersonal apparatus and scattered population naturally became more complex as the borders of first the nation-state and later the empire were expanded. The gradual experience of modernity as registered by the onset of the nation-state can be understood as an uncoupling of *nation* from *state*. Initially, the people were their own nation, without any separate concept of a political *state*. It was only the gradual development of greater and greater political entities that created a distinction in these concepts, and brought a myriad different people into the fold of the *state*.

It was not always so. Raymond Williams draws attention to a further term capable of implying both *people* and *state*. This term is *society*, and it was a crucial one throughout Williams's career. Williams points out that *society* retained the dual

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[1] Williams, *Resources of Hope* ed. Robin Gable, (London: Verso, 1988), p.111. Cited hereafter as *RH*.

meanings of people in general, and the political organization in particular, until the end of the eighteenth century:

> If you look through an eighteenth-century writer... and see how he uses the word 'society,' you'll find that in one paragraph he will mean what we would now have to express as 'company' or simply 'being with other people...' He will in the next paragraph be likely to use 'society' to mean... the systematic set of political and general arrangements by which a given people live: society as a social *system*. And this simultaneous use of the same term for quite different meanings has a piece of history in it which may be crucially relevant in the attempt to think nationalist politics in our own generation. (*RH*, p.112).

The fact that the term *society* retained these twin implications into the eighteenth century implies that until comparatively recently the ideas of a people and of a political organization were coterminous. It was only the process of modernisation as it was enabled by ever-expanding technologies of transport and communication that would bring different peoples into the fold of the nation-state and so separate the immediacy of control that had previously existed between individual or small-scale groups of people and their leaders. The change in meaning of the term *nation*, from a local group of people to a large-scale political organization, was a recent change. The nation-state, in other words, was an organ of cultural and political modernity.

With the drift from *nation* to *state* came an uncoupling of the two different meanings of the term, *society*, and eventual replacement of one by the other. Williams notes that initially, it 'was a word that was consciously opposed to the word *state* – *state* with all its implications of the power structure, the display centre of decision and authority.' (*RH,* p.112). He suggests that to attempt 'to counterpose *society* to the *state*' was also to insist that there was 'a whole area of lived relationships which was other than the centre of power and display.' (*RH,* p.112). As the nation-state became entrenched as *the* principal means by which people understood their relationship with people they had not met, yet with whom they nevertheless felt themselves to have certain things in common, this sense of the opposition between *society* and *state* would collapse. Having appeared on the horizon, the modern national organization appeared to offer to satisfy a number of human needs: for kinship, relationship, community and communication. As a result, the nation-state very quickly came to absorb the prior meanings of the concept of *society*, which duly ceased to be opposed to it.

There were relatively few dissenters to the formation of a nation-state as such throughout the period from 1550 to 1850. As Raymond Williams writes, 'it is a matter of great political significance that in the old nation-states, and especially the imperial states, scepticism and criticism of such bonding has come almost exclusively from radicals.'[2] While the new means of communication and transport appeared to offer people unbounded possibilities for social and physical mobility, while also meeting the human need for relationship with fellow people on a broader scale than had previously been possible, it was political radicals who approached the process of technological modernisation – and the political organization which supported it - with a note of caution. The cultural, political and technical processes of combining people into a well-ordered nation-state had a precise material history. Political radicals were the first to glimpse this history. As Williams writes, 'they have seen, correctly, that this form of bonding operates to mobilise people for wars or to embellish and disguise forms of social and political control and obedience.' (*T2000*, p.183). In other words, the new kinds of political organization that had emerged during the Elizabethan period led to the formation of a new kind of social hierarchy, where a minority of political decision makers came to rule over a powerless and distanced populace. Thus Williams writes, '[i]t can be said that the Welsh people have been oppressed by the English state for some seven centuries. Yet it can also then be said that the English people have been oppressed by the English state for even longer.'[3]

The concept of nationhood achieved rapid eminence in the minds of the majority of British people. This was so to the extent that the residual eighteenth-century concept of society – as radical opposition to the formation of a centralistic state apparatus – collapsed and disappeared. How was it possible for this to happen? How could the very people who had most to lose by the political organization of a centralistic state evince such enthusiasm for it?

One answer to this might relate to the new conditions of urbanisation that developed with the industrial revolution. Raymond Williams notes that 'by 1881 a majority of the British people were living in towns of 20,000 or more inhabitants. London had passed the million mark early in the nineteenth century; by mid-century its population was over two and a half million and by 1900 over six million. The new

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[2] Williams, *Towards 2000*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1983), pp.182-83. Cited hereafter as *T2000*.
[3] Williams, *Who Speaks for Wales?* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), p.16. Cited hereafter as *WSW*.

industrial cities were developing at often even more explosive rates.'[4] The conditions of living in these new, crowded conurbations, coupled with the hitherto unfamiliar experience of encountering dozens of strangers on a daily basis, created a need for new cultural forms, to enable people to understand the new ways in which they related to one another. This in turn impacted on the kinds of cultural experiences in which the new urban population engaged, as Williams notes:

> Within these unprecedented conditions, old oral forms, such as the sermon, were extended and developed; and relatively new oral forms – the outdoor and indoor political meeting, now often of vast size, and the popular lecture series – became central elements of urban culture. (*WCS*, p.124).

If the archetypal nineteenth-century experience was one of a crowd, then this was reflected in the cultural forms of the time. The popular lecture and sermon, and above all, the political rally, were kinds of cultural experience that incorporated a far greater number of people than had previously been the case. The nineteenth century was also the period during which modern large-scale spectator sports began to take off: 'Again, from mid-century, organised sport, especially football and horse-racing, developed within the new urban culture.' (*WCS*, p.125).

Lectures, sermons, and organized sport each contributed to a situation where many more people could attend or participate in the same cultural activity simultaneously than had previously been the case. These conditions alone, however, do not explain how new cultural forms could enable a diverse body of people to conceive of themselves as part of a wider nation-state. Indeed, the drift away from earlier versions of the nation, identified by social relationships at a purely local level, was dependent on the replacement of this element of simultaneous assembly. The new large-scale concept of the nation-state was dependent on the capacity for people to receive the same kinds of communication and cultural experience *without* the need for such conscious assembly. Arguably the modern nation is defined by the capacity of its members to share in the same networks of communication, over great distances, without such assembly.

Raymond Williams suggested that one of the ways in which this kind of development began to occur was in the social extension of drama. Drama had residual

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[4] Williams, *What I Came to Say*, (London: Radius, 1990), p.124. Cited hereafter as *WCS*.

associations with organized religion and worship. As a result, it had links backwards to previous conceptions of society, where it had been religion – coupled with the social structure of a rural aristocracy – that had provided the main elements of social cohesion. At the same time, the technical improvements that altered the nature of drama during the industrial revolution also affected its mobility and provision. The new transport networks and comparable advances in commercial activity meant that the touring theatre company, and the provincial playhouse, each became far more prominent elements of British culture. Thus, social drama had one foot in the older medieval conception of community, while having the other firmly anchored in the experience of modernisation. As Raymond Williams puts it:

> It was in the sixteenth century that drama changed, as a social process, from an occasional to a regular provision. The performance of plays at set times of year, usually as part of a religious festival, came to be replaced by a repertory of productions in new kinds of theatre. In England, for example, the first commercial theatres were built in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, significantly at the approaches to the City of London, to catch a passing as well as a resident trade. Their physical structure followed precedents in performances in the courtyards of inns. Thus the transition from the occasional drama to regular drama was directly associated with a more mobile, trading society. (*WCS*, pp.185-86).

The mobile society is the crucial point to emerge from this passage. It was the mobile society that enabled greater and greater numbers of people over greater and greater distances to engage in the same cultural experiences and to communicate those experiences with each other in new ways. Yet the social provision of drama was still primarily dependent on the conscious assembly of people in one place at a time; it was not able to unify the nation synchronically.

Two developments were crucial in answering this need: the new technologies of rail transport, and the emerging cultural form of the modern daily newspaper. The railways, for example, were significant not simply because of their capacity to disseminate commercial freight and merchandise, but also because of the related cultural developments. As Williams points out, the new railway stations became places for meeting and exchanging news and ideas. They also became mini-markets, and this perhaps was the crucial breakthrough, for it was in the new railway stations that the new cultural forms of the newspaper and the novel were primarily sold. The trains themselves carried these things around the country, creating a potential for

simultaneous communion in cultural experience which far surpassed anything that had preceded it:

> it was in the bookstalls at the new stations, notably those of W.H. Smith, that the public could be reached in a new way. The cheap Parlour Library, and then the Railway Library, poured through this new outlet: the yellow-backs, with glossy covers, illustrated in colour, and carrying advertising on their backs.[5]

Of course, not only the carriage of books and newspapers, but also the brute fact of rapid long-distance transit created a new sense of social relationship. The networks in which people moved became wider and more diverse as a direct result of the railway lines, enabling more and more people to imagine themselves related in some social or cultural manner to a growing number of other people, of whom they would previously have admitted no cognisance. Williams writes:

> there is almost certainly... a crucial differential between urban and rural people, and - within the urban – between London and other cities. Distribution methods, which would flatten these differentials, were not radically changed until the mid-century establishment of the railway network. (*WCS*, p.123).

The emergence of a national rail network combined the modern technologies of transport with the post-enlightenment need to imagine human relations separately from the central and commanding institution of the church. The national rail system then did not simply emerge as a result of the new nineteenth-century sense of the British nation; it also played an active part in generating that sense.

So it was with the modern newspaper. The newspaper emerged from the eighteenth century as a local organ, capable of holding together a local community at a relatively small scale, by enabling its readers to share communicative experiences. Technical improvements in print and distribution combined with commercial ventures in the direction of combine ownership. This combination of technology and capitalism, interacting with the human need to explore the radically new kinds of urban experience that the industrial revolution had generated, provided the decisive forms. Williams notes that 'steam printing of *The Times* began in 1814, and speed of production was steadily raised by mechanical improvements. The eventual combination of rapid steam production with the new, fast distribution system made

[5] Williams, *The Long Revolution*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p.190. Cited hereafter as *LR*.

available by the developing railway network, produced the conditions for major expansion.' (WCS 127).

The expansions that began to occur were two-fold. Firstly, the areas covered by a 'local' newspaper became greater and greater, as a result of new methods of transport and distribution. Subsequently, the local newspapers of the eighteenth century began to be bought up by fewer and fewer commercial blocks, so that even while the diversity of actual local newspapers remained, the overall number of newspaper proprietors decreased:

> In the second half of the nineteenth century the ownership and control of newspapers moved, in the majority of cases, from small and often local family businesses to a more concentrated corporate stage, in which whole strings of newspapers and magazines were owned by a few powerful individuals or groups. (*WCS*, p.181).

The result of this increasing centralisation, coupled with increased combine ownership, would eventually be registered in the form of the national daily newspaper, or simply the 'nationals.' In this way, modern cultural forms and modern technologies each contributed directly to the new concept of the modern nation. As a result, Raymond Williams felt that the nation-state was fundamentally an institution of cultural and political modernity. I shall argue later that a correlate of this is that to enter a historical period when these developments have either been concluded, or lost some of their importance, is to enter a period when the national imagination too is up for renegotiation.

Benedict Anderson and the Imagined Community

If these ideas of Williams seem rather abstract and theoretical, then they are perhaps better understood through recourse to the work of one of Williams's younger contemporaries. Benedict Anderson's study, *Imagined Communities* (1982) explored in much more detail the ways in which the history of writing in general – and of print media in particular – overlapped with and informed the history of the nation-state. According to Anderson's argument, it was the technologies of printing and distribution that enabled the nation-state to imagine itself into existence as such.

Anderson argues that a nation is an imagined community, in the sense that it is a large-scale socially cohesive entity of which its members may feel themselves to be

a part even though they might not, indeed probably will not, meet, encounter or learn of the existence of the majority of other members. He defines the nation as an imagined community in the following way:

> It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion... it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.[6]

Anderson characterises the nation as a combination of horizontal comradeship with a lack of knowledge of the particular existence of one's comrades. The nation is an imagined community because its members assume the existence of each other without direct knowledge of such existence. Central to this conception of a nation is a materialist analysis of the means of representation that enable such large-scale imagining. The earlier systems of religion, and of intra-continental ruling dynasties, had sown some of the seeds for a new concept of the modern nation. Anderson suggests that even more than these, one factor was crucial in the imagining-into-being of the nation-state. This factor was print capitalism. As Anderson puts it:

> economic change, 'discoveries' (social and scientific), and the development of increasingly rapid communications, drove a harsh wedge between cosmology and history. No surprise then that the search was on... for a new way of linking fraternity, power and time meaningfully together. Nothing perhaps more precipitated this search, nor made it more fruitful, than print-capitalism, which made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways.[7]

The nation-state could not have been imagined without the mobilisation within the mind of a sufficient number of people of a concept of *nation*. This is where the fuller relations in which writing is also involved have also to be considered. For in reaching such a number of people, writing was involved in all sorts of other material processes: of transportation, distribution and communication. In the full sense then, the history of the nation-state is analogous with the history of writing only insofar as the history of writing must be understood as a complex interaction with other histories: the

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[6] Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1991), pp.6-7.
[7] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p.36.

development of roads, railways, and shipping, to name but a few. Without these, there could be no widespread distribution of writing and hence no imagined community. The nation became imagined into being as a sufficient body of writing reached a sufficient number of people to enable such a cognitive association to occur. To understand this process materially we need to understand both the active properties of the writing at the level of content, and the fuller material relations in which it is involved.

Like Raymond Williams, Anderson suggests that the two forms in which print capitalism would most directly contribute to the national imagination were the modern *novel* and the *modern newspaper*. The modern novel, for example, addresses itself to a precise community of readers: a general 'we.' The members of this group can presume each other to exist without ever having met or heard of each other. Indeed, this is the central premise of the nineteenth-century novel of personal confession. The 'Dear reader' novel was overwhelmingly the most commonly produced form in the nineteenth century. The narrator speaks as an 'I' who assumes fellowship and membership of a general 'we' – a collective group of people, unfamiliar to each other, yet sharing certain cultural knowledge and rituals.

As an example of how the 'I'/'We' novel enables its readers to form themselves into an imagined community, Anderson gives more detailed analysis of José Joaquín Fernandez de Lizardi's novel, *El Periquillo Sarniento* (*The Itching Parrot*, 1816). The novel was written shortly before Mexican independence from Spain. Indeed, Anderson describes it as 'evidently the first Latin American work in this genre.'[8] Although it was written prior to Mexican independence, the Mexican nation is already present, in embryonic form, within the structure of the novel. Anderson says of *The Itching Parrot*:

> we see the 'national imagination' at work in the movement of a solitary hero through a sociological landscape of a fixity that fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside. This picaresque *tour d'horison* – hospitals, prisons, remote villages, monasteries, Indians, Negroes – is nonetheless not a *tour du monde*. The horizon is clearly bounded: it is that of colonial Mexico. Nothing assures us of this sociological solidity more than the succession of plurals. For they conjure up a social space full of *comparable* prisons, none in itself of any unique importance, but all representative (in their simultaneous, separate existence) of the oppressiveness of *this* colony.[9]

[8] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p.29.
[9] Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* p.30. Emphasis in original.

In this way, the novel operates as the locus for the unfolding of a precise relationship between writer and readers. The general typification of prisons, hospitals and so on militates against an insistence on the differential identities of each reader, and instead focuses on the realisation of a communion involving each. In this way, the novel imagines the Mexican community into existence. The technologies of print, transport and distribution would only serve to augment this bond, for these technologies brought the novel – and others like it – to every corner of the territory that would subsequently become identified as the Mexican nation.

Another example Anderson analyses is the novel *Black Semarang,* published serially by Indonesian Mas Marco Kartodikromo in 1924. There, the relationship between writer and body of readers is cemented by the repeated use of 'our' and 'us', with the effect that again, the Indonesian national community is imagined into being before becoming a geo-political reality. I shall argue in Chapter Four that recent novels from Scotland and Wales work in the same way. It is not only the appeal to solidarity, or the invocation of common places, persons and experiences, that create this sense of communion. The simple fact of reading the same material at the same time also creates this cohesion.

If this is true of the novel, it is true to an even greater extent of the modern daily newspaper. As Anderson says, 'in this perspective, the newspaper is merely an *extreme form* of the book.'[10] For not only does the newspaper mobilise familiar political, linguistic and cultural landscapes for common consumption, it is also the capacity of the daily newspaper to be read *simultaneously* by the majority of its readers. Consumption of the morning or evening daily national newspaper thus becomes elevated to the status of a kind of common ritual, capable of unifying the populace in unspoken – but communicative – congress across the land, just as the earlier rituals of religion had contributed to the prior imagined community of the church. Anderson explains this in the following way:

> We know that particular morning and evening editions will overwhelmingly be consumed between this hour and that, only on this day, not that... The significance of this mass ceremony... is paradoxical. It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore, this ceremony is incessantly repeated at daily or

[10] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p.34.

> half-daily intervals throughout the calendar. What more vivid figure for the secular, historically clocked, imagined community can be envisioned? [11]

The modern novel and the modern newspaper then were two of the main tools by which print capitalism contributed to the national imagination. It is a matter of great significance that both of these examples are popular cultural forms, reproduced and disseminated in great numbers. Anderson does not discuss the minority literature of the intellectual elite, or even the reading habits of the bourgeoisie. Moreover, the examples of popular novels he discusses are all drawn from the colonial world, rather than from the metropolitan nations of Europe. He shows how these novels play a direct and formative part in the anti-colonial imagination.

Anderson draws attention to the tendency of emerging nations to figure themselves as new. This was the case in post-revolutionary France and America. There was even an attempt in France to restart the calendar at Year One in the aftermath of the revolution, in order to enshrine this sense of novelty in the post-revolutionary nation's sense of itself.

However, modernity would not allow this. Already by 1789, Anderson points out, not only newspapers but also mass-produced watches, calendars, clocks, diaries and written records of all kinds existed. These militated against the cancellation of anterior time since the technologies of reproduction meant that the measuring of time was ineradicable. The plan to restart French history with Year One (for revolution) failed, because the French already knew that the year was 1789.[12]

This gives rise to what Anderson calls the temporal paradox of nationhood. Emerging nations naturally figured themselves as new until discovering that they were unable to do so. As a result, they sought instead to try to do so on the basis of established history and antiquity. History itself became a new academic discipline in Berlin and Paris in the 1820s, and in America a little later. In the new national historiographies, 1776 in America and 1789 in France ceased to be seen as new beginnings. A new kind of history emerged, suggesting that 1776 did not mark a 'new' America or 1789 a 'new' France. Rather, these moments represented the rediscovery of ancient or mythic kinds of community which had already existed.

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[11] Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* p.35.
[12] Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* p.194.

Nationhood is thus legitimated by this invocation of the ancient past, rather than on the basis of novelty.

Anderson gives a detailed example of this in the work of August Renan. In a famous paper entitled 'What is a Nation?' Renan had averred that the formation of a nation requires that certain things – conflicts, wars, disputes – be forgotten. Anderson quotes Renan's suggestion that the emergence of a unified French nation during the early modern period relied on a general forgetting of the Saint Barthélemy massacres of 1572, or the Midi massacres of the thirteenth century. If the nation is conceived as deep, horizontal comradeship, then memory of these things seems to detract from the emotional appeal of national unity. Yet in reminding the French people to forget such things, Renan assumed that everyone within the national community remembers what they are.[13]

To solve this apparent paradox, Anderson suggests, a precise kind of writing emerged in the new historiography of the nineteenth century. This took the form of a retrospective re-writing, wherein, for example, the thirteenth-century massacres cease to be figured as violent conflict between Avignon and the Catalans, and the sixteenth-century conflicts cease to be figured as bitter fights between Catholics and Protestants. These conflicts instead are retrospectively re-written as inter-fratricidal conflicts *between Frenchmen*. Out of this arises a common (national) history. Anderson refers to the kind of historiography he finds in Renan – and throughout the nineteenth century – as the 'reassuring use of fratricide.'[14] It removes the specific differentials from a violent history and creates instead this harmonious whole.

Anderson detects similar examples in the American Civil war, and the Norman conquest of Britain. In the novels of Fenimore Cooper, for instance, or Melville, or even Twain, conflicts between early settlers and native Americans, or again between established settlers and Negro slaves, are not figured as violent inter-racial conflicts. They are instead figured as a communion of early Americans, each trying to survive in a hostile environment. All of these novels were set in a period before they were written – a national mythic past.

Raymond Williams picks up on the Norman example when he draws attention to the irony whereby modern British history is often taught as though it began 'somewhere around 1066, when a Norman-Frenchman replaced a Norse-Saxon

[13] Quoted in Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p.200.
[14] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp.199-201.

monarch.' (*T2000*, p.193). Again, in such histories, William the Conqueror ceases to be figured as a violent alien invader and is presented instead as the original *English* monarch.

The nation cannot be imagined as radical and new at a time of revolution or war, when it is falling apart into violence and disunity. A precise biography provides a nation with a story about who it is and what it stands for. The biography of a nation cannot provide the same kinds of fact as the biography of a person, because with a nation there is no simplistic start or end date. Because nations have no beginning or end, these things can only be generated in myth or narrative. Anderson finds examples of this kind of national myth in every modern nation, from King Arthur to Javan Man. Newspapers, novels and print capitalism all play a key part in the narrative of the modern nation. To serve the narrative purpose, the myths of war and violence on which the nation is founded must be forgotten as such, and then remembered, as part of 'our own' history.[15]

Benedict Anderson's notion of the *imagined community* helps us to understand what Raymond Williams means by cultural materialism. Each writer emphasises the materially active part played by cultural forms such as writing in the generation of a social order. Implicit in this is the idea that to generate a new narrative of identity is to contribute to the formation of a new or alternative version of the nation. Over the next five chapters I shall analyse the part played by cultural forms in generating a sense of unified British culture during the national and imperial period. I shall also begin to look at the ways in which more recent work has begun to question or contest the make-up of that unitary identity.

Tom Nairn and the Capitalist State

What Anderson's analysis fails to provide is a sense of the inter-dependence of two forms of nationalism, the revolutionary (or popular) and the official (or aristocratic). Tom Nairn argues in *The Break-Up of Britain* (1977) that it is not so much that there are two different kinds of nationalism. Rather, there is a fundamental contradiction built into the character of nationalism itself. As a result of this dynamic, Nairn argues,

[15] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p.206.

the modern nation-state arose as an institution capable of enabling the spread of organized capitalism. As with nationalism, there is also a fundamental contradiction in the operation of capitalism. Capitalism appears to unify the world by creating a unified economic system of exchange. At the same time, capitalism also militates against such unity by dividing the world into the nation-states whose separate, parallel existence enables a market economy to prosper. To Nairn, the modern nation-state was not only a response to the spread of organized capitalism from the seventeenth century onwards. It was also an active agent in that expansion.

Nairn began *The Break-Up of Britain* by wondering why, given the imbrication of the nation-state with international capitalism, opposition to the unitary British state emerged in the 1970s in the form of Scottish and Welsh nationalism, rather than as socialist class struggle. To answer this, Nairn looks at the unique history of the British state. In particular, he is interested in how the capitalist class was defined as the bringer of modernity.

Nairn argues that the key date is the revolution of 1688. This ended the system of rule by absolute monarchy and gave rise to a period of bourgeois consolidation of the machinery of economic and political control. It is these two elements, bourgeois revolution and consolidation, which produced the British nation-state as an organ of political modernity. The fact that these developments happened in Britain in the period after 1688 meant in turn that the British state was the first national state formation to come into existence anywhere in the world: it became the first modern developed state. As Nairn says, '[t]he multi-national state-form that has ruled there from 1688 to the present time could not be *typical* of general modern development simply because it initiated so much of it.'[16]

In other words, to Nairn, the British state is the prototypical institution of cultural and political modernity, a blueprint to be copied by other constitutions and other formations in other states. Arising out of the transition from feudalism to modernity, the British state could not be fully modern itself. It is, Nairn goes on to argue, a unique blend of the feudal with the two key factors of modernisation: the bourgeois capitalist class and the nascent forces of industrialisation. This blend is unlike the other European nations, which sought to copy the blueprint provided by the

[16] Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain*, (London: Verso, 1981), p.15.

British state without precisely being able to replicate it, lacking the historical combination of archaism and modernity:

> Because it was first, the English – later British – experience remained distinct. Because they came second, into a world where the English Revolution had already succeeded and expanded, later bourgeois societies could not repeat this early development. Their study and imitation engendered something quite different: the truly modern doctrine of the abstract or 'impersonal' state which, because of its abstract nature, could be imitated in subsequent history. [17]

This sets up an interesting question about the temporal placing of modernity. To Nairn, the British state was the first-born child of modernisation. Because of this fact, it was unable to slough off its traces of the pre-modern world in which it remained rooted. The paradox then presented is not that the process of modernisation was completed in Britain before it arrived in other nations. It is not that Britain's period of modernisation has already been concluded. The problem is on the contrary, that Britain's constitution remains not modern enough. This paradoxical definition of the temporal location of modernity would provoke Raymond Williams, in one of his last ever public lectures, to ask 'When was modernism?'[18]

Tom Nairn uses the term 'priority' to describe this situation whereby Britain became the first nation to arrive into the modern world, and as a result, was unable to develop along the same lines as other nations which sought to imitate it. He says of the British constitution:

> Although a developmental oddity belonging to the era of transition from absolutism to capitalist modernity, its anomalous character was first crystallized and then protected by priority. As the road-making state into modern times, it inevitably retained much from the medieval territory it left behind: a cluster of deep-laid archaisms still central to English society and the British state. Yet the developmental position encouraged the secular retention of these traits, and a constant return to them as the special mystique of the British Constitution and way of life. Once the road-system had been built up, for other peoples as well as the English, the latter were never compelled to reform themselves along the lines which the English Revolution had made possible. They had acquired such great advantages from leading the way – above all in the shape of empire – that for over two centuries it was easier to consolidate or re-exploit this primary role than to break with it.[19]

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[17] Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain*, p.17.
[18] Williams, *The Politics of Modernism*, (London: Verso, 1989), p.31. Cited hereafter as *PM*.
[19] Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain*, pp.64-65.

The concept of priority has two meanings here. Firstly it refers to that process whereby the British state became the first modern state in the world. Related to this, it refers to the conscious policies adopted by that state: a logic of economic priority. This is where the history of the British state intersects with the history of its empire, revealing a mutually constitutive relationship. As Nairn points out, the primary affluence created by the British empire meant that for more than two centuries, there was little pressure to reform the state apparatus. This gave rise to the 'special mystique' of the British constitution. It includes seemingly archaic elements of British political life such as the wearing of gowns and wigs in Parliament, national ceremonies such as the State opening of Parliament, and the anomalous longevity of an unreformed upper chamber. Raymond Williams would, following Walter Bagehot, refer to these as the 'theatrical elements of the constitution.' (*RH*, p.259).

This mystique of Britishness, coupled with the economic prosperity generated by imperial practices, forestalled and deflected some of the pressure to reform the British political state until long after the revolutions of the 1600s which might otherwise have gained momentum. In other words, Nairn argues that those revolutions provided other peoples with a blueprint to copy, and actually enabled them to go even further in their political reforms than had been possible in the initial revolutions in Britain. Thus 1789 in France was a copy of 1688 in England, but able to go much further than England because having got there first, England was still at the transitional stage away from absolutism and feudalism.

The British state apparatus that emerged from 1688 was nowhere near as radical as that of Paris in the 1790s. It was a moderate revolution, capable of treading the middle ground between a feudal aristocratic culture and the demand for much more general social reform. This blend enabled the capitalist bourgeoisie to prosper by dominating the apparatus of state. This was done through the alliance of the landowners with members of the industrial bourgeoisie, *against* the proletariat. Thus the bourgeois revolution of 1688 was not much of a revolution at all. Nairn, like Anderson, concludes that the abolition of the monarchy in 1649 had far greater potential for democratic revolution. The effects of *that* revolution, however, were vitiated by the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. Nairn argues that Britain has been in need of a second political revolution ever since:

> There was no second political revolution, so that the more radical tendencies of the bourgeoisie were diverted and absorbed into the dense machinery of civil hegemony. As this happened the new working class was also diverted and repressed: the defeat of early nineteenth-century radicalism forced it into a curious kind of social and political *apartheid*. This condition was almost the opposite of the active intervention from below which figured in so many modern revolutions; so, therefore, was the mythology, or underlying political consciousness, which it generated.[20]

This is different from the nationalisms discussed by Benedict Anderson, where nationalist revolution comes from 'below.' Anderson's idea of nationalism is that it implies that power comes from a popular base in the people who thereby seek to control themselves. In the context of nineteenth-century Britain, this was generally absent. The masses – where they were mobilised at all - were mobilised from above, rather than by themselves, and Britain's nationalism accordingly had to be based on conservative myths of the organic society.

The 1640s had absorbed the radical end of the bourgeoisie into civil society, and the nineteenth century saw a weakening of the potential for working-class revolt, culminating in the defeat of Chartism in the 1840s. The working class itself was then absorbed into the political and economic order of Britain's civil society. This was achieved via a consciously generated emphasis on the public sphere, and on the traditions, customs and cultural practices that the public could hold in common. It is for this reason that Raymond Williams emphasises the importance of modern communal or widely disseminated cultural forms such as the theatre, sport, newspapers and the new practice of long-distance travel in the development of the modern nation.

The priority attached to maintaining the cohesion of civil society continued into the twentieth century. Meanwhile, the need for the second revolution to which Nairn draws attention became latent rather than manifest. On the other hand, that need would never entirely disappear, either. For more than half of the twentieth century, the affluence generated by empire coupled with the continued functioning of civil society would ensure a measure of social cohesion and forestall in advance further pressure for social, economic and democratic reform.

With the end of empire came two related developments. Firstly, the public national rituals associated with empire – coronations, anniversaries, national holidays

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[20] Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain*, p.41.

of all kinds – were no longer available to play their part in the generation of social cohesion. More importantly, the removal of the imperial hinterlands which for so long had provided the economic affluence conducive to civil cohesion revealed, relatively rapidly, sharp differences in material standards of living and in access to real political power between increasing numbers of British people.

The latent need for a second revolution which for so long had been bought off by a combination of civil society and real prosperity finally emerged into the open again, in the 1970s, in the form of trade union militancy across the country, racial antagonisms, and Scottish and Welsh opposition to the unitary British state. Thus, nationalism in Scotland and Wales was in part generated by the wider push towards socialist democracy, in opposition to the capitalist state.

Nairn concludes that there are thus two tenable views of the unitary state: 'If one does not recognize that it is moribund... then naturally Scottish and Welsh nationalism will appear as destructive forces – as a basically irrational turning back towards forgotten centuries, as involution at the expense of progress. Whether conservative or socialist, belief in a continuing unitary state of the British Isles entails viewing these movements as a threat.'[21] On the other hand, if we take the view that the state had never fulfilled its offer to bring Britain into the modern world by providing for the first time a proper measure of democracy and equality to all the peoples of Britain, then these movements appear in another light. As Nairn says:

> if one perceives the United Kingdom as an *ancien régime* with no particular title to survival or endless allegiance, then the breakaway movements may appear in a different light. The phrase 'We must preserve the unity of the United Kingdom' is currently intoned like a litany by most leaders of British public life. Its magic properties are obviously derived from the cults of Constitution and Sovereignty. Merely to refuse this sacrament allows the observer to begin, at least, to acknowledge some positive side in the cause of the smaller nations.[22]

The positive side that Nairn detects in the nationalisms of Scotland and Wales is aligned to the activity of trade unions and labour militancy that also erupted in the English industrial regions during the same period. It is not a matter of abstract chauvinism, but of advancing the cause of functioning democracy. The history of the British state tells us that the moderate revolution of 1688 failed to end a kind of

[21] Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain*, p.73.
[22] Ibid.

political absolutism. Nations where this has been the case have taken the first step towards modern social democracy, without being able to cross the threshold into it. Such nations are left at the gateway to modernity, and this is how Nairn understands the whole history of the British state. It is a state whose modernity is both already concluded, and yet to arrive.

When the crisis of a global recession emerged in the 1960s, this became manifest in the form of popular anti-imperial revolutions. These took the form of nationalisms of various kinds, because nationalism was the only available historical precedent for revolution. Thus there was suddenly an emergence of – for example – revolutionary Cubans; republican Irishmen; and a host of nation-bound revolutionary proletariats in Angola, Mozambique, Korea, Vietnam and others. It is in this global perspective on the crisis in capitalism that Nairn understands the emergence of socialist nationalisms in Scotland and Wales. This is in contrast to the revolution of an international proletariat, and complements Benedict Anderson's notion of reassuring fratricide: the ways in which histories of a nation retrospectively imagine its people into a national formation, such as early Americans, early Frenchmen, the first English king. Emerging revolutionary groups imagine themselves as specific national communities, and narrative plays a central part in that imagination.

Unofficial Narrative: Williams and Bhabha

The argument presented by Williams, Nairn and Anderson is a socialist and hegemonic one. The nation-state was imagined into being as an organ of its ruling class, for the benefit of expanding power and control over the working classes at home and colonised societies abroad. Literature plays a part in making this power relation possible. To produce a kind of writing that disputes this imperial construction of the nation is thus to play a material part in undermining the unitary make-up of the nation itself.

In a more recent study entitled *Nation and Narration*, Homi K. Bhabha has sought to complicate Benedict Anderson's notion of the *imagined community*, which he perceived as too deterministic. Indeed, in Anderson's account, the creation of the nation-state and hence of a social order can seem like something of a *fait accompli*. This could also be said of Williams's exclusive emphasis on the part played by the

ruling class in creating a national order – although I shall argue in Chapter One that Williams combined materialist analysis of cultural forms with semiotic analysis of the social order specifically to find ways in which that order might be resisted.

Bhabha, like Anderson, suggests that nation-states can only be created via a mobilisation of material forms of signification. Bhabha goes a step further. As a result of this dependence on signification, he argues, there is always the possibility that new signifying forms will imagine new forms of relationship into existence. Thus the nation-state can be negated at the very moment of its assertion through mobilisation of the material forms on which it depends.

In *Nation and Narration*, Bhabha invokes Julia Kristeva's sense of the multi-accentuality of all language.[23] Bhabha knows from Anderson that a nation has always to be imagined, narrated into existence. He learns from Kristeva that the language in which narrative is created is always amenable to multi-accentual interpretation: all words mean different things in different contexts. Thus there is always the possibility of reinterpreting the official narrative on which the modern nation-state is founded. Interestingly, Bhabha then turns to the work of Raymond Williams, in order to expand upon this generation of oppositional meanings.

Bhabha invokes Williams's sense of *dominant, residual* and *emergent* cultural practices, in order to explore the possibility of negating the social order. Williams had developed this critical vocabulary in *Marxism and Literature*, arising out of his interest in both Marxism and semiotics. What Williams calls the cultural *dominant* is related to the ruling-class hegemony, tied in to large-scale institutions of broadcasting and cultural production and the images of society that these institutions implicitly ratify.[24] The *residual* means not only the archaic, but refers to those elements of the dominant which have become less visibly active in the daily life of a society, while at the same time retaining a strong latent power of their own. Examples Williams gives of residual elements in British society are rural communities, the established church, and the monarchy (*ML,* p.122). It is only *emergent* practices which can operate as truly oppositional forms, able to contest social and political processes. The emergence in the nineteenth century of the radical popular press is an important example (*ML,* p.124).

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[23] Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.3-4 and p.305.
[24] Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p.121. Cited hereafter as *ML*.

This sense of how emergent forms can be used to contest or dispute the make-up of a social order is a necessary corrective to the too exclusive emphasis that would otherwise be placed on the role of the ruling class. Bhabha and Williams show that the nation is never as straightforwardly unified as its official narratives would suggest. Consequently, the possibility for narrating a different kind of nation remains open.

Over the course of the next five chapters, I shall provide materialist analysis of a series of very specific emergences. The first two chapters are devoted to exploring how Williams developed his theory of cultural materialism. In Chapter One, I argue that Williams developed his theory of culture by combining a theoretical critique of national literary traditions with an interest in the emergent drama of nineteenth-century Scandinavia and twentieth-century Ireland and Wales. This theme is developed in Chapter Two, where I suggest that certain cultural and political experiences in Wales helped Williams to develop a cultural theory that was more generally applicable. Williams as novelist had learned from an earlier generation of Welsh working-class novelists such as Lewis Jones and Gwyn Thomas. As a result, not only did Williams consciously position his own novels in that tradition of Welsh industrial writing; he also developed a theory of how writing participates in historical processes which can be used to shed light on those earlier novels.

Central to Williams's political aspirations was an attempt to expand and democratise the education system. In Chapter Three, I elucidate the proposals Williams made for reforming the education system. I argue that Williams's novels can be understood as university fiction, providing examples of the kind of university he wished to develop. This is in contradistinction to the campus novels written by the so-called 'Movement' group of writers, especially Kingsley Amis and John Wain. I argue that Williams's university, unlike theirs, is envisaged as a component in the development of a democratic society. I also argue that since universities arose as institutions capable of generating a sense of unified national culture during the imperial period, to re-think the work of the university is also to re-think the political and cultural make-up of the nation.

This theme is expanded in Chapter Four, where I argue that Williams related the break-up of the British empire to the break-up of the British state, via devolution in Scotland and Wales. I provide a reading of Williams's *The Country and The City* to reveal the extent to which Williams can be understood as a postcolonial writer. This reading of *The Country and The City* is then tied in to a detailed reading of Williams's

novel, *The Volunteers*. I show that these texts make an implicit conjunction between formal decolonisation overseas and political devolution in Scotland and Wales.

Williams theorised the part played by fiction and other cultural forms in enabling those nations to develop their own voices. I explore the ways in which this occurs in contemporary writing from Scotland and Wales, especially in the work of Alasdair Gray and Malcolm Pryce. Williams also showed that fiction could provide an imaginative critique of the unitary British state from a series of other perspectives, notably feminism and ethnic subcultures. Accordingly, I conclude Chapter Four by examining the writing of A.S. Byatt, Salman Rushdie and Kazuo Ishiguro. I argue that the symbolic break-up of the British union that can be found occurring in contemporary writing is not limited to the growth of new confident identities in Scotland and Wales. It also includes a renegotiation of national identity along these other conceptual coordinates. Finally, I argue in Chapter Five that Raymond Williams can be understood as a film theorist, and demonstrate that a similar renegotiation of British identities occurs in contemporary film.

These cultural and political emergences taken together comprise the process that Tom Nairn describes as 'the break-up of Britain.' Nairn's study of that title is his take on Williams's sense of dominant, emergent and residual cultural practices in contemporary Britain. The unitary British state of which Nairn's account remains the most thorough-going critique has been *the* dominant cultural form in Britain for centuries. It might be in the process of becoming residual. If this is so, it is only because certain other formations which would seek to supersede it are in the process of emerging. Clearly, the historical processes at work involve a complex interplay between dominant, emergent and residual forms. Keeping Williams's sense of this interplay alive, therefore, it is to those processes and formations that I must now turn.

Chapter One: Towards a Materialism of Culture

What is cultural materialism? The question is not a flippant one. Much recent theoretical work in English studies has proven remarkably unable to answer this question, and has at times served only to confuse what it seeks to clarify.

Cultural materialism has become identified with a kind of Lacanian approach to literary texts. Such an approach typically defines *materialism* as a process of language acquisition. It analyses the process of subjectivity formation as it is worked out in the dialectical relationship between the ego and the social environment. This relationship is registered in and through language, so that this approach demonstrates how individual subjectivities are materially generated in the process of language acquisition. It then goes on to extrapolate the extent to which the manifestation of this process in literary texts is also a material affair. It is an approach that draws on Freud's theory of sublimated sexual desire, and transposes this into a general textual economy of desire.

Scott Wilson's 1995 study, *Cultural Materialism* follows this trajectory. Wilson begins by using Freudian psychoanalysis as an instrument for understanding the process of self-fashioning. He then goes on to extrapolate the Freudian concept of desire, elevating it into a general principle for the interpretation of literary texts, especially Shakespearean. Broadly speaking, this extrapolation follows the sophistication introduced into the field of psychoanalysis by Jacques Lacan, and moves away from the perhaps rigid deterministic approach of Freud.[1] The same could be said of Alan Sinfield's *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (1992) and John Brannigan's *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* (1998).[2]

So far so good. Whence the confusion? *Cultural materialism* is a term coined by Raymond Williams in the introduction to his 1977 study, *Marxism and Literature*. It is, in Williams's own words, a 'Marxist theory' of culture. (*ML*, p.5). Williams did

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[1] Wilson declares in his introduction that his approach to cultural materialism is 'to interrogate materialism by introducing the psychoanalytic notion of the real... in Jacques Lacan.' See Wilson, *Cultural Materialism*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), ix.

[2] Brannigan argues that the two founding texts of cultural materialism are Raymond Williams's *Marxism and Literature* and Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*. Alan Sinfield combines the work of Williams and Lacan in his analysis of Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Macbeth*. See Brannigan, *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* (London: MacMillan, 1998) pp.49-53; and Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) pp.52-79.

not write about Freud, or Lacan, very much at all. Indeed, over the course of thirty-four published books and countless journal articles, Williams's references to Freud are few and far between. Williams appears to have been suspicious of what he saw as the bourgeois, individualist and anti-historical tendencies that could be said to exist in Freud.[3] As a result, the emphasis of Williams's cultural materialism is all about the correspondingly socialist and historical tendencies to be found in Marxism.

This is the confusion: recent work on cultural materialism is heavily indebted to the work of Williams. Wilson, Sinfield and Brannigan all acknowledge Williams as the founder of the field, cultural materialism, in which they operate.[4] Yet their approach is often explicitly psychoanalytic or semiotic, drawing far more on the instruments of Freud and Lacan than on Marx. This theoretical approach is not clearly used in the work of Williams, despite the assertion of these theorists that his work was the cornerstone of their own. He appears not to have founded the field that they credit him with having founded. Cultural materialism as Williams understood it was a Marxist theory of culture. Cultural materialism in the guises I have mentioned appears to be a psychoanalytic approach, drawing more on Freud and Lacan than on Marx. Which then is the 'real' cultural materialism?

In this chapter, I propose to map out Raymond Williams's career in approximately chronological order. I wish to explore the process by which he developed his materialist theory of culture, over a long period of time and through recourse to several different areas of research. My argument is that although cultural materialism as Williams defined it is rightly identified as a Marxist theory, Williams's work also overlapped more with the field of semiotic theory than is often acknowledged – hence the recent confusion as to how to define cultural materialism. I shall track the evolution of cultural materialism as an analytic theory that combined the work of Marx, Freud and Lacan, transforming each in the process, in order to arrive at a sophisticated theory of culture.

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[3] Williams says in his autobiographical interviews, published as *Politics and Letters* in 1979, 'I have never felt that Freud and Marx could be combined in that way. There can be no useful compromise between a description of basic realities as ahistorical and universal and a description of them as diversely created or modified by a changing human history.' See *Politics and Letters* (London: New Left Books, 1979), pp.183-84. Cited hereafter as *PL*.

[4] Alan Sinfield discusses 'the importance of Raymond Williams' in the introduction to *Faultlines*. Scott Wilson similarly describes 'the work of Raymond Williams' as 'seminal,' while Brannigan accords Williams 'key theorist' status in discussing the origins of cultural materialism. See Sinfield, *Faultlines*, p.9; Wilson, *Cultural Materialism*, ix; and Brannigan, *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*, pp.31-33.

The First Turning Point

Raymond Williams's early intellectual formation is best understood through reference to the intellectual milieu in which he operated. Three names spring immediately to mind: I.A Richards, F.R. Leavis, and E.M.W. Tillyard. When Williams arrived in Cambridge as an undergraduate in 1939, not much more than a decade had elapsed since the publication of Richards's *Principles of Literary Criticism,* which had established 'practical criticism' as the dominant method of the Cambridge English tripos. Leavis had published his pamphlet *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* in 1930, urging the social and literary elite to defend its way of life against the encroachments of the degraded masses. Williams's own tutor, Tillyard, was somewhere around the height of his career, producing study after study of Elizabethan and Victorian poetry, emphasising the organic, harmonious and supposedly timeless nature of idyllic English society.[5]

The best word to describe the approach to literature which was dominant when Williams arrived in Cambridge is literary *idealism*. Practical criticism as Richards defined it was a way of viewing the literary text, as it were, in isolation. It had been developed partly out of the dictates of the English course. Typically, the object of practical criticism was a short poem, or, exceptionally, a short passage of prose. This had the advantage of being capable of being transmitted to students quickly in advance of a tutorial. During the exercise of practical criticism itself, the students were supposed to examine the text for its innate properties: What did the text mean? How did it generate this meaning? How successful was it as art?

The question that practical criticism did not address was *how* students were to arrive at these judgements. Indeed, it seemed to require them to intuitively know what constitutes great art, and how. This value was taken to reside in the works themselves somehow, rather than in the students' estimation of them. This was more or less by definition true, since, in order for the students to have been presented with a poem or

[5] The best-known of these studies are Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture,* (London: Pimlico, 1998, first published 1943), and *Shakespeare's History Plays*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991, first published 1944).

passage of prose in the first place, the piece had *a priori* been selected as a specimen of great literature worthy of appreciation.

This selection would of course have been made by the tutors and committees of the English faculty, and it is here that Richards's *practical criticism* intersects with the work of his colleague, F. R. Leavis. Leavis at this time was already beginning to develop the ideas that would culminate in the publication of his classic study, *The Great Tradition*, in 1948. In this work, Leavis sketched out what he took to be the finest representative works from a continuous organic tradition: the English novel. *The Great Tradition* depended essentially on a circular argument. Anything that Leavis discussed in it, from Austen to Conrad, was by definition *great literature.* Anything that was understood as great literature was by the same token selected. As Leavis himself put it, 'by *great tradition* I mean the tradition to which what is great in English fiction belongs.'[6] Raymond Williams recalls in *Politics and Letters* in 1979 that the Leavis approach to literary history remained the 'going position' in Cambridge for decades (*PL,* p.245).

Practical criticism and *The Great Tradition* rely heavily on a notion of literary idealism. These approaches assume that the literary text is best considered in isolation from any separate kind of knowledge or understanding. Each approach assumes that the literary text innately contains its own meanings and values, and that these cannot vary from reader to reader. In other words, it disavows the possibility that readers might call those same meanings and values into question. This is especially true of *The Great Tradition*, which is constructed to define all of the best qualities of Englishness as they are manifest in five centuries of classic literature, in a continuing harmonious culture. Any values which did not adhere to those defined by the great tradition were considered not worthy of consideration. This meant in practice that literary texts which expressed alternative values were rejected altogether. It meant also that students and readers who wanted to bring alternative values to bear on their interpretations of the 'great' works were generally discouraged, if not actively prevented, from doing so.

Literary idealism is a curious thing. It assumes that it is possible to approach a literary text with no more knowledge of the world than that which is generated by the text itself. At best, this requires readers to 'pretend' not to know the things that they

[6] F.R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, (1948; London: Chatto and Windus, 1979), p.7. Emphasis in original.

do know about history, about politics, and about the world, in order to prevent these 'debased' and 'materialist' factors from impinging on their assessment of the work of art. At worst, it actively disavows the knowledge of the world brought into the process of reading, as if the people bringing that knowledge into their reading somehow did not count, or were not worth knowing about. The great tradition is composed primarily from a precise sector within ruling-class England. It assumes that to be anything other than ruling-class, male and Anglican is automatically not to count.

When Raymond Williams, who was neither ruling-class nor Anglican, began to bring his positively working-class and (at least putatively) non-conformist experience to bear on the ways in which he read literary texts, he was mildly rebuked by his tutor, E.M.W. Tillyard, for not playing the great tradition game.[7] Before I sketch out the process by which Williams developed his historical and material approach to the understanding of written texts in contradistinction to the dominant perspective of literary idealism, however, I wish to explore the ways in which that perspective informed his own early critical work.

Williams's study at Cambridge was interrupted when he went to serve as a tank captain in Normandy during the Second World War. Upon discharge, he completed his degree and then went to work as an adult education tutor in the extra-mural delegation of Oxford University. During this period, he began work on what was in effect his first book of literary criticism, *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* (although by the time he had managed to get it published in 1952, he had already published *Reading and Criticism* in 1950).[8]

Williams's selection of T.S. Eliot as the terminus for his own take on the great tradition is not an arbitrary one. For if Richards, Leavis and Tillyard can be seen as the key theorists of literary idealism, then Eliot was its main practitioner. Despite the many frustrations Williams encountered as an undergraduate grappling with the great tradition, this choice of culmination therefore implicitly reveals the extent to which that idealistic approach had taken hold within Williams's own mind.

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[7] Terry Eagleton refers to a famous incident in which Tillyard claimed that the only memorable thing about Williams was the size of the boots he wore, since Williams had to attend tutorials directly after military training. See Eagleton (ed.), *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), p.5. Compare Williams, 'it is very easy for a teacher to use his superiority in that way,' *PL*, p.51.

[8] Williams clarifies this in *PL*, p.190.

In the introduction to *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* Williams sets out an early critical and methodological position. His approach is a textual one, concentrating on isolated individual works of drama:

> It is literary criticism also, which, in its major part is based on demonstrated judgements from texts, rather than on historical survey or generalised impressions: of the kind, that is to say, which is known in England as practical criticism. Practical criticism began, in the work of Eliot, Richards, Leavis, Empson, and Murry, mainly in relation to poetry. It has since been developed, notably by both F.R. and Q.D. Leavis, in relation to the novel. In the drama, apart from the work of Eliot on Elizabethan dramatists and of other critics of Shakespeare, the usefulness of practical criticism remains to be tested. This book, in addition to its main objects, is intended, therefore, as a working experiment in the application of practical critical methods to modern dramatic literature.[9]

Williams's approach at this early stage is a literary-critical, or idealist, one. He sets out to test the applicability of practical criticism to studies of drama. The thesis Williams propounds in *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* is that drama is best understood in terms of its capacity to communicate an experience to an audience. Williams suggests that the overall design of a dramatist is best realised when he or she retains direct control of the play. That is, high art requires strict policing:

> It seems to me that the most valuable drama is achieved when the technique of performance reserves to the dramatist primary control. It does not greatly matter whether this control is direct or indirect. In an age when it is accepted that the centre of drama is language, such control is reasonably assured. For when the centre of the drama is language, the *form* of the play will be essentially literary: the dramatist will adopt certain conventions of language through which to work. And if in such a case, the technique of performance – methods of speaking, movement and design – is of such a kind that it will communicate completely the conventions of the dramatist, the full power of the drama is available to be deployed. (*DIE*, p.29).

The vague reference to 'the age' is counter-intuitive. For in the 1950s it was by no means clear that the centre of drama was language. Williams's whole argument about naturalist drama was that it represented a turn away from the powerful controlling language of the playwright that we find in Shakespearean and Jacobean drama, towards an elaboration of costume, set, prop and action. These he terms 'substitute effects' (*DIE*, p.75) for they deflect attention away from the controlling power of language. Only the best of contemporary drama, to Williams, retains this controlling

[9] Williams, *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1952), p.12. Cited hereafter as *DIE*.

power. This shows Williams caught in an impasse between high minority art and degraded mass culture. There is a real fervour with which he advocates the dramatist's tight control over language, and the implied need for a strict policing of high art.

Williams believed that communication is best achieved as a process when the dramatist finds the forms and conventions which are most appropriate to the experience he is seeking to convey. These conventions must be recognisable to the audience as such, rather than appearing as mere reproduction of lifelike behaviour. An example Williams gives of such dramatic convention is the chorus of mythical Greek Eumenides in T.S. Eliot's play, *The Family Reunion* (*DIE,* p.245). Use of convention generates dramatic tension between the familiar and the innovative, and so enables drama to function as a profound source of communication. This interplay between novelty and the familiar was the basis of Eliot's own dramatic practice. As Eliot wrote:

> One error, in fact, of eccentricity in poetry is to seek for new human emotions to express, and in this search for novelty in the wrong place it discovers the perverse. The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones and, in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all.[10]

Eliot argues that the job of the poet or verse dramatist is to work everyday emotions up into a new kind of experience. This sounds very much like Williams's idea of the intensification of what is already familiar.

Williams's positive valuation of Eliot and his recapitulation of I.A. Richards's *practical criticism* points to an early difficulty which is both theoretical and methodological. The argument of *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* is that communication can only really be achieved by the utilisation of a form appropriate to the experience being communicated and to the receivers of the communication. Not only is it theoretically compromised and hamstrung by a strenuous emphasis on the defence of a minority culture, but this theoretical blindness impacts on the construction of the argument itself. For Williams's attempt at finding means for expanding access to cultural forms recapitulates and extends the idea of a minority culture in danger of being swamped:

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[10] T.S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), p.48.

> The pressure of a mechanical environment has dictated mechanical ways of thought, feeling and conjunction, which artists, and a few of like temper, reject only by conscious resistance and great labour. That is why all serious literature, in our own period, tends to become minority literature... It will never become majority drama if it is to wait on the spread of universal beliefs. But its communication may be extended, and its writing made possible, if developments in society (the sum of individual developments) make possible the re-creation of certain modes of living and of language against which such complexes as industrialism have militated. (*DIE,* pp.27-28).

The nostalgia evinced in this passage for the putatively harmonious days of a pre-industrial society underlines the extent to which Williams's early work was shot through with the traces of Leavis and Eliot.[11] It is harder to imagine any writer in the English language who more fully idealises feudal and medieval society than those two, and Williams, at the beginning at least, seems taken in.[12]

The abstractions Williams employs here fall short of a seriously engaged sociological critique. Williams announced in the introduction that his method would be essentially a literary-critical one, so that by the parameters of investigation which he has set himself, he is unable to relate the literary forms to the social, economic and political formations with which they are involved.

What could have become a dynamic and radical exploration of the impact of a minority culture on a wider social scale thus becomes foreshortened. Instead of a textualising strategy à la Leavis and instead also of a developed sociological inquiry into the processes of communication through critical literacy we end up with a book compromised on both fronts. The compromise is manifested in the vague formulations 'such complexes as industrialism'; 'mechanical ways of thought'; and 'certain modes of living and of language.' What are these complexes and how do they relate to each other? These were the questions which Williams would attempt to answer throughout his subsequent career.

The key turning point for Williams came with publication in 1958 of his career-making *Culture and Society*. This is quite unlike his early work, which remained in thrall to the defence of a minority culture against the invasion of a degraded mass. In *Culture and Society,* Williams's whole argument is that the extension of participatory culture is not only a matter of taking pre-formed cultural

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[11] The rapprochement to Leavis is discussed by Andrew Milner in his *Literature, Culture and Society,* (London: University College Press, 1996), p.34.

[12] For an account of Williams's eventual break with Leavis see R.P. Bilan, 'Raymond Williams: From Leavis to Marx' in *Queens Quarterly* 87 (1980).

forms to the masses. Williams insists that there are in reality no masses – only 'ways of seeing others as masses.'[13] The defence of a minority culture against the incursions of an unappreciative mass is no longer his theme.

Williams began *Culture and Society* by drawing attention to five words which had come into English usage for the first time at around the end of the eighteenth century: *industry*, *democracy, class*, *art*, *culture*. To Williams, the emergence and historic variation in meaning of these words was evidence of a wider shift in social relations. *Industry* had ceased to be understood as a general term for work, or even a personal quality of conscientiousness. It had come to refer solely to the mechanised production of material goods in factories, with implications of danger, dirt and poor living conditions. *Class* was then a term used in a rather rigid and deterministic way to refer to the people involved in this work – usually with negative connotations, as in the nineteenth-century phrase, *lower class*, and in contradistinction to the assumed refinement of a social elite, the *upper class*.

At the same time, *art* had ceased to mean *skill,* and had instead come to refer to things such as painting, literature and music – although the extreme vagueness of definition was one of the stimuli to Williams's dissatisfaction with these terms. The same is true of *culture,* which had ceased to be used to refer to the cultivation and growth of crops, and was now being used instead as a synonym for *civilisation*. Yet the metaphoric appeal of the earlier meanings, *growth* and *cultivation*, still retained a powerful general appeal, so that *culture* had implications of natural growth, beauty, harmony and peace. *Culture* was in short the opposite of *industry*. It was radically dissociated from the lives of people who worked in industry – that is, from the lives of the majority of people in Britain. *Democracy* on this reckoning was tantamount to a dirty word. By offering to include people in social, political and cultural formations, it appeared to threaten the very structure of those formations.

The work Williams undertakes in *Culture and Society* is twofold. Firstly, he sets out to probe the process by which it became possible to understand *culture* as somehow separate from majority human activities. At the same time, he attempted to overcome this separation. Thus there are two methodologies at work in the text. A kind of literary *archaeology*, whereby Williams probed the emergence of the terms under discussion, is accompanied by a strenuous *reinterpretation* of that whole

[13] Williams, *Culture and Society,* (1958; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p.289. Cited hereafter as *CS*.

tradition, in order to overcome it. Thus the opening chapter, 'Contrasts', shows that the separation between culture and life was initially active in the work of Edmund Burke and William Cobbett. Yet these two writers are contrasted with a pair of more politically progressive figures, Robert Southey and Robert Owen, in order to show that the two different perspectives on culture run right through.

The two positions can be described as *idealism* and *materialism*. Idealism was the dominant position when Williams was writing in the 1950s. It has strong implications of social exclusion and political reaction. Politically, Williams explores its development in the work of Burke, J.S. Mill, Thomas Carlyle and Matthew Arnold. Culturally, the important moment is that of romanticism, for Williams suggests that it was the romantic artist who first developed a self-conscious separation from daily social life.

The categories of *politics* and *culture* are disingenuous, since the point of *Culture and Society* was to reveal that these areas of life are far more inter-related than the practice of literary idealism would suggest. When Williams looked back on the goals of the work, in the interviews published in *Politics and Letters* in 1979, he stated explicitly that the aim of *Culture and Society* was to 'reconnect' the concepts of art, literature and culture with the daily lives of the people of the country (*PL*, p.110). The chapters of *Culture and Society* devoted to Pugin, Lawrence and T.S. Eliot all show that this separation remained the dominant ideological practice at the time of writing. Thus Williams points out in *Politics and Letters* that the work of *Culture and Society* was 'oppositional' (*PL*, p.97) in this ideological sense.

As we have seen, the main theorists of literary idealism were I.A. Richards and F.R. Leavis. Thus in opposing that dominant institutional practice, Williams was also seeking to modify the work of those two men. Accordingly, the section of *Culture and Society* about Eliot is followed by a strong critique of Richards and Leavis, which is tantamount to the conclusion of the book:

> There is an element of passivity in his [Richards's] idea of the relationship between reader and work which might in the end be disabling.... [H]e has not offered enough really convincing examples of the intense realization of a rich or complex organization, which in general terms he has often described. He often notes the complexity, but the discussion that follows is usually a return on itself, a return to the category 'complexity', rather than an indication of that ultimate refinement and adjustment which is his most positive general value. One has the sense of a manipulation of objects which are separate from the reader, which are *out there* in the environment. (*CS*, pp.244-45, emphasis in original).

Williams here exposes the circular argument on which practical criticism and *The Great Tradition* depend. Great literature is defined by its complexity; complex texts are taken to be examples of great literature. This recapitulates the separation between writing and society which Williams wrote *Culture and Society* specifically to overcome. To achieve this, Williams tried to break down preconceived notions of the *literary* and sought instead to open up English studies to broader forms of writing, and hence to value a greater range of human experience. He sought to decentre literature as a discipline, and open it up to a broader range of objects of study:

> Leavis might reasonably reply, to what I have written, that to see literature as a specialism among others is not to see literature at all. I would agree with this. But the emphasis I am trying to make is that, in the work of continuity and change, and just because of the elements of disintegration, we cannot make literary experience the sole, or even the central test. We cannot even, I would argue, put the important stress on the 'minority', for the idea of the conscious minority is itself no more than a defensive symptom against the general dangers. (*CS*, p.254).

The concept of *literature* is in effect demolished by the conclusion of *Culture and Society*, and with it the implicit defence of an elite minority culture is opened up to political and sociological critique. In *Culture and Society* Williams pinpoints the historical process by which *art* became separated from *society* and constituted as its own fully autonomous field. A fully materialist approach to art would seek to overcome this separation. This is what happened during the subsequent decades of Williams's career.

Marxism – and Literature

The Great Tradition is founded upon a circular argument. Anything that Leavis writes about is by definition great literature. Anything which he considered great literature is included in his study. Raymond Williams's frustration with this was that there was no externally verifiable definition of 'literature.' Indeed, the term seemed to *exclude* more kinds of writing than it *included*. Not only were any kinds of non-imaginative works (journalism, diaries, letters) out of the equation, but the majority of imaginative works also were excluded from the canon. To reject literary idealism was thus to

reject 'literature' as a categorical essence, and open up cultural analysis to more varied forms of writing.

In a curiously paradoxical move, the new approach to writing which Williams propounded both under- and over-valued the role played by literature in society. As a categorical essence, the concept of *literature* was rejected. This rejection led Williams to explore the ways in which literature – now defined as *writing* – is materially active in society, and helps cause social and political changes to occur. Thus, *literature* is somewhat devalued as a concept, at the same time that actual literary works are shown to have more material power than had previously seemed possible.

This material turn depends strongly on Williams's engagement with Marxist theory – and what he perceived as Marx's inability to develop a sophisticated theory of culture. As he put it, 'an increasing number of Marxists now believe that cultural theory has become even more important, in modern social and cultural conditions, than it was in Marx's own day.' (*WCS*, p.196).

According to Marx, human societies consist of a controlling economic base and a controlled superstructure – the domain of culture.[14] The crucial activity not assigned by Marx to the category of superstructure is that of commodity production and exchange. It is the basic premise of classical Marxism that whoever controls the means of production in any given society controls ultimately also much broader conditions of social and cultural life. This influence can be extended to cover the entire scope of human activities and hence Marx assigns to the economy a causal position in relation to those activities which are regarded as superstructural or secondary and dependent.

It is easy to see how the secondary and dependent view of cultural products can be aligned with the literary idealism that I outlined above. In each case the literary text is assumed to be zoned off from material contact with the outside world. This congruence exists despite the wildly different political perspectives of Marx, and later, Leavis and Richards.

Williams acknowledges the causal power of the economy. He suggests that the economy is only causally effective because its power is manifested through a range of other social and material practices. In *The Long Revolution*, published in 1961 as a

[14] The foundation of this approach is generally held to be Marx's 'Preface' to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. See Marx, *The Marx- Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (London: Norton, 1975), p.5.

companion volume to *Culture and Society*, he identifies four systems crucial to the development of social and cultural life. These are the system of decision; the system of maintenance; the system of learning and communication; and the system of generation and nurture (*LR,* p.133). Roughly speaking, by these systems Williams means politics, the economy, education and care for others.[15] In Marx's work, most of the emphasis is placed upon the first two. Williams refers to this as a 'conditioned reflex to various forms of class society' in which 'the true nature of society – a human organization for common needs – was in fact filtered through the interests in power and property which were natural to ruling groups' (*LR,* p.131). To acquiesce to this filtered view of society is to remain entrapped by the power of the economic base. For if we were able to reveal the extent to which this power can only operate by suppressing the systems of communication and generation, we would be able to rethink social determinism.

When looking back on this point in *Politics and Letters,* Williams tried to clarify what he meant by this. He considers the example of the industrial revolution – and refuses to see it solely as a transformation in economic relations:

> For the industrial revolution was among other things a revolution in the production of literacy and it is at this point that the argument turns full circle. The steam press was as much a part of the industrial revolution as the steam jenny or the steam locomotive. What it was producing was literacy; and with it a new kind of newspaper and novel. The traditional formulations that I was attacking would have seen the press as only a reflection at a much later stage of the economic order, which had produced the political order which had then produced the cultural order which had produced the press. Whereas the revolution itself, as a transformation of the mode of production, already included many changes which the ordinary definitions... said were not economic. The task was not to see how the industrial revolution affected other sectors, but to see that it was an industrial revolution in the production of culture as much as an industrial revolution in clothing... or in the production of light, of power, of building materials. (*PL,* p.144).

Williams examines the notion that an economic order produces a political order which in turn produces a cultural order. The advantage of this differentiation of societal activities into different levels is that – contra literary idealism – it emphasises that there is a relationship between political/ historical processes and literature. Williams does not stop there, however. This three-stage reflection theory posits a view of the literary text which is entirely passive, as if it is entirely dependent on other processes

[15] Though Williams's own definitions here seem vague, Patrick Brantlinger suggests that vagueness was the price he paid for a 'remarkable openness to history and diversity.' See Brantlinger, *Crusoe's Footprints: Cultural Studies in Britain and America,* (London: Routledge: 1990), p.58.

worked out in advance. To Williams, the writing of a literary text is already a process in itself, rather than a mere reflection of other processes. Rather than positing a model where all the important developments in a society are elsewhere, and are merely reflected second-hand by literary texts, Williams developed a position whence he could argue that the production of a literary text itself is an active process in society.

The name Williams would later give to that position is cultural materialism. It tells us that the forces active at the economic base have no power in the abstract. They are only effective because they operate in and through systems of communication and nurture as well as through the systems of decision and maintenance.[16] In the words of the French Marxist Louis Althusser, these systems then retain a *relative autonomy*.[17] There is thus no two-tiered structure of economic decision and superstructual reaction. There is rather an integration of all social activities, mutually constituting and informing.

Literature must then be seen as an inextricable element of much broader social processes. It contributes to the making and contesting of a social whole. At the same time, it is partially produced by other elements in that whole. Without the industrial revolution, we might say, no Dickens. But in a sense without Dickens, the kind of society that was produced by industrialisation would also be qualitatively different.

Accordingly, what Williams refers to as the 'long revolution' is simultaneously a revolution in literary form, *and* in social democracy. The changed conditions of industrial society simultaneously produced changed conditions of reading and writing. Adult literary was greatly expanded. This literacy expanded greatly beyond the strictly *functional* level, and encompassed a literacy of critical thinking. Throughout the long revolution, from the early nineteenth century, new kinds of writing played a precise part in this kind of critical consciousness and hence participated in a broader revolution – towards democratic change. Important examples Williams gives of this kind of writing are Godwin's *Caleb Williams*; Dickens's *Dombey and Son* and Gaskell's *North and South*.[18] The important point to emphasise

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[16] However, Williams himself was somewhat guilty of neglecting the system of nurture, and this has provoked considerable critique, especially from feminists. Morag Shiach suggests that Williams understood 'nurture' as a metaphor for 'women in general.' She concludes that as a result, feminists might find many useful ideas in the work of Williams, but are unlikely to 'find many women.' See Shiach, 'A Gendered History of Cultural Categories' in *Cultural Materialism: On Raymond Williams* ed. Christopher Prendergast, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p.51.

[17] See Althusser, *For Marx* trans. Ben Brewster, (New York: Pantheon, 1969), p.111.

[18] See Williams, *Writing in Society*, (London: Verso, 1984), pp.142-49 and pp.158-60. Cited hereafter as *WS*.

then is that these texts are not considered in isolation. Williams reads them in the context of that broader revolution towards democratic forms, in which the writing is both reflection on social change *and* active stimulant towards further change.

Writing, and cultural forms in general, are thus revealed to be materially active within a society, rather than simply passive reflections on it. Stuart Hall suggests that the two texts in which Williams most fully probes this material relation between writing and social processes are *The Country and The City* (1973) and *Marxism and Literature* (1977).[19] In each of these texts, Williams draws parallels between the construction of specific social orders, and the practice of specific kinds of writing. I shall show in more detail in Chapter Four that *The Country and The City* is Williams's study of the history of nation-building, and of the part played by writing in that process. *Marxism and Literature* is an attempt to theorise the relationship between writing and the capitalist social order:

> The social and political order which maintains a capitalist market, like the social and political struggles which created it, is necessarily a material production. From castles and palaces and churches to prisons and workhouses and schools; from weapons of war to a controlled press: any ruling class, in variable ways though always materially, produces a social and political order. These are never superstructural activities. They are the necessarily material production within which an apparently self-subsistent mode of production can alone be carried on. The complexity of this process is especially remarkable in advanced capitalist societies , where it is wholly beside the point to isolate 'production' and 'industry' from the comparably material production of 'defence', 'law and order', 'welfare', 'entertainment' and 'public opinion.' (*ML*, p.93).

Williams refuses to isolate the press, the police, industry or the economy. This is tantamount to a disavowal of the Marxist concepts of *base* and *superstructure*. To see cultural production as somehow secondary and immaterial would be to approach it from the idealist perspective from which Williams had struggled to depart. This would seriously limit Marxist analysis of cultural forms for it would prevent detailed analysis of the part played by cultural forms in the formation of a social order.

In *Marxism and Literature* Williams defines the social order as one of organized international capitalism. In his earlier study, *The Country and The City* (1973), he had equated the incubation of a capitalist order during the early modern period with the building of national states. These different versions of the social order

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[19] See Hall, 'Politics and Letters' in *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives* ed. Terry Eagleton, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), p.64.

are then mapped onto each other. The nation-state itself is revealed to be an important element of the capitalist order. This transposition from *nation* to *capitalist order* is analysed in *Marxism and Literature* through a rigorous critique of the concept of a *national tradition* in literature.

Williams was aware that the concept of *literature* had emerged during the seventeenth century. Initially, it had an emphasis on learning and observation, giving way to a valorisation of works of creativity or imagination during the nineteenth century (*ML,* p.48). The accompanying concept of *national tradition* emerged to embody and express the best of all cultural and literary production from a nation's history, in effect telling the nation all the best things about itself. By definition works which did not or could not be made to conform to this model of the nation and its history had to be excluded from the national tradition, along with whatever experiences and values they expressed.

Argument over what is and is not 'literature' on this reckoning becomes much more than an academic debate over the ontological status of seventeenth-century documents. It becomes the terrain on which the whole question of what ideas and experiences are to be accepted and valued in the contemporary world is also fought out. If the notion of the literary retains any significance, it is by drawing attention to the different stories a society tells itself about who its members are and how they are constituted. Williams shows that this literary debate is ongoing and contested rather than finished and stable. To appreciate Williams's critique of the concept of national tradition fully, we must turn to the work on drama that he produced in the 1960s.

Drama, Nation, Voice

As the *New Left Review* editors put to Williams in *Politics and Letters,* one of the earliest areas in which he had visibly departed from the organicist approach of Leavis and the practical-critical approach of Richards was that of drama (*PL*, p.190). Williams had paid a great deal of attention to drama, from his earliest work in *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot.* Leavis by contrast was notably silent on that whole area.

This is a very curious phenomenon. One of the ways in which Leavis had asserted the continuity of his great tradition of English letters was through the manifest continuity of a linguistic inheritance. In *Politics and Letters,* Williams

characterises this Leavisite notion of linguistic heritage as the 'notion of language as a continuous legacy through the ages that carries the finest insights of community' (*PL,* pp.176-77). One might expect that the spoken voice of drama could provide the kinds of evidence for the continuity of a harmonious linguistic community that Leavis asserted. His oversight of drama thus seems to be a very striking one. This is the case unless we overhaul the notion of a continuous linguistic heritage, and reject with it the idealist reading of literary traditions and hence of national essence. It may well be that Leavis maintained a deep silence on the matter of drama precisely because rather than evincing evidence of his cherished linguistic organic community, it actually evinced the opposite: a tradition of discontinuity and rupture.

This at least is what Williams finds in dramatic history. If, as Williams averred, *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* was an experiment in the applicability of practical criticism to drama, it was an experiment which failed. Or rather, it succeeded – in demonstrating the *inapplicability* of that approach. This chimed in with Williams's deepening realisation that for all its seductions, practical criticism was inappropriate as a means of understanding how writing works.

The significant thing about *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* is that although its *methodology* is a practical-critical one, its *object* is greatly extended. It is the first text in which Williams analyses in length a body of writing other than the English canon. The drama in which he professes an interest is very much the drama of emerging peripheral nations: Scandinavia and Ireland. As he told the *Politics and Letters* interviewers, 'it is a historical fact that from the 1890s... the significant drama was always a minority breakaway from the majority commercial theatres.' (*PL*, p.194). In turning his attention to this minority theatre, he was already implicitly raising the kinds of question that practical criticism had not allowed him: why is the mainstream theatre of England and France so weak? Why is the emergent drama of these other nations so rich? What are the historical conditions relating to these developments? This questioning became more explicitly the case in his subsequent book, *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* (1968).

Williams's enthusiasm for the marginalized drama of Scandinavia, Ireland and Wales is best expressed in one word: *polyphony*. He is interested in the kinds of drama that mobilise a variety of voices and that maintain this variety up to and beyond the conclusion of the dramatic action, so that the plays in question can be said to resist a narrative logic of closure. This is the case in various ways in the patterned

voices of the drama of Sean O'Casey, Yeats, Ibsen, Strindberg, and, in another context, Dylan Thomas.

Although Williams was Professor of Drama at Cambridge from 1974-84, his writing on English drama is comparatively slight. No doubt this was because he believed the achievement of English dramatists since the renaissance to be comparably slight. In a late essay on 'English naturalism,' Williams explored the reasons for this. He suggested that the drama of nineteenth-century England and France was relatively weak because historical conditions did not allow for innovative, oppositional or polyphonic vocal work. This is implicitly related to the conditions of stability arising out of the strongly imperial nature of Britain and France at the time: oppositional voices were not encouraged.[20] Indeed, in Chapter Three I shall examine the historic role played by cultural forms in creating a strongly unified – rather than polyvalent – sense of national culture in these societies.

Williams's interest in the emergent drama of Scandinavia, Ireland and Wales follows a precise trajectory. He is not interested in the monological nature of English theatre in the nineteenth century because he thinks that the theatrical space had been occupied by anti-democratic tendencies and did not enable a multiplicity of voices on the stage. If *monarchy* produces *monologue*, we might say, then the emerging nations of *democracy* are better suited to *dialogue*.

This patterning of polyphonic voices was most fully realised in the expressionist plays of August Strindberg. Throughout *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht,* Williams discusses the writing for pure disembodied voice that Strindberg mobilised. This multiplicity of voices worked against a narrative logic of closure: in a real sense, it was hard to say how exactly these plays ended. *The Road to Damascus*, for example, 'yielded to a simultaneity of past and future' which enabled the play not only to reflect upon a precise historical experience, but also to posit a variety of multiple different potential futures.[21] *Dreamplay* employs the method of a dream as 'a means of serious analysis of the experience of identity' in which the only 'unifying mechanism' is the 'consciousness of the dreamer', and where the convention of utilising several different voices militates against the resolution of singular identities at the play's conclusion (*DIB*, p.95). *Ghost Sonata* achieves this multiplicity of voices

[20] See Williams, 'Social Environment and Theatrical Environment: The Case of English Naturalism' in *Problems in Materialism and Culture,* (London: Verso, 1980), especially p.134 and p.144. Cited hereafter as *PMC*.
[21] Williams, *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht,* (London: Hogarth Press, 1987), p.90. Cited hereafter as *DIB*.

in a 'persistent pattern', so that again, no single voice is allowed to dominate (*DIB,* p.99).

This kind of drama simply *could* not have been produced in imperial societies, where emerging and dissident voices would not become audible until later – as, for example, in Ireland. The process of industrialisation in Ireland would create radically new relationships. Mass migration from rural to urban areas created conditions in which people for the first time became accustomed to encountering strangers on a regular basis. How they might relate to each other, in the conditions of relative crowding that characterised urban life, was then a major question.

When Williams praises the Irish drama of Synge and O'Casey, it is precisely because the plays of these dramatists did not only reflect passively the disorientating changes which had occurred. They also actively helped to develop new forms of relationship, and new forms of community, in which the people of Ireland could feel at home. Thus in both these writers, there is a 'sense of a specific social transition from rural to urban speech.' (*PL,* p.195). This was the history of Ireland at the time. The drama was then part of that history.

In *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*, Williams praises the drama of W.B. Yeats in similar terms. Yeats too was able to 'draw on the source of vitality in Irish country speech' (*DIB,* p.122). This new linguistic resource again existed in dialectical relation to the society from which it was drawn. By mobilising the patterns of speech that he found in the contemporary world, Yeats was able to develop an understanding of the changes that were beginning to come over Ireland. Williams suggests that Yeats's most successful play was *The Death of Cuchulain*. He describes the achievement of Yeats in the following way:

> What he had done, in his theatre, and what he had encouraged others to do, was indeed just this: to think, to imagine, a dramatic figure, until it "stood where they had stood." And then it was not only Cuchulain (in the legends that remained, for the most part, an exploitation of local colour) but a contemporary Irish world. (*DIB,* p.128).

The plays of Synge, O'Casey and Yeats are all understood as material elements within a general Irish history. The strength of the plays in question is that they provide a positive resource for the understanding of changed social relations, through the mobilisation on the stage of a multiplicity of different voices. This both

reflected the changed material circumstances of life in Ireland and contributed to further change – to the development of democratic forms of relationship and representation.

Williams's interest in the voice, and its relation to historical processes, opens a rich vein of congruence between his dramatic criticism and the concurrent work of semiotics, which had itself arisen partly out of Freudian psychoanalysis. In semiotics, the whole object of investigation is language. Williams reveals in *Politics and Letters* that he was fully aware of the congruence between his work and that of semiotics, and of a precise historical reason for it. He points out to his interviewers that the historical conditions which had enabled the emergence of the expressionist theatre were the very conditions which had also given rise to Freudian psychoanalysis. The historical process of modernity had created conditions of unfamiliarity, mobility, exile and change at such frighteningly rapid pace that the result was a discursive practice given over to exploring and understanding those changes. This is what Williams finds happening in the emergent Scandinavian drama and in the same manner – though in a different form – in the psychoanalytic theory of Freud. As a result, Williams likens Freud to a modernist writer:

> Freud's writings should be read, not so much as a body of science, as what are called in another category novels – and as such they are extraordinarily interesting, although of course they have an extraordinarily different status. One reads them as one would read the closely connected contemporary writing of Strindberg or Proust, granting no necessary prior validity because they were based on clinical experience, simply because between the clinical experience and the text there is the process of composition. After all, what is the validity of Strindberg or Proust? Their work articulates another kind of experience, an observation of experience, which preceded and continued into the process of observation. (*PL*, p.332).

The reading of Freud as novelist is based on the idea that Freud produces a kind of writing unlike anything that had gone before, arising out of the precise historical experience of modernisation.[22] Williams wishes to de-privilege Freud of the aura of scientific authority, while at the same time drawing attention to the utility of considering Freud's work specifically as a body of writing which can then be understood historically like any other. What is interesting is that we then find – despite differences of form – an important area of congruence between the

[22] Interestingly, Williams says the same of Marx: that Marx had much in common with the important modernist writers but chose to express his observations of change in a different form – for pressing historical and political reasons. See *WSW*, p.85.

expressionist drama and Freudian theory, at the level of content, and specifically in the matter of the multiplicity of voice. To elucidate this, I wish to turn my attention to the work of Williams's own contemporary, the French psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva.

Cultural Materialism and Historical Semiotics

Kristeva is a psychoanalyst in the Lacanian mould: she is interested in how subjectivity is formed as a linguistic process and in how the self is always a linguistic construct. She interrogates the Freudian narrative of subjectivity formation as a journey from *nature* to *culture* founded on the civilising repression of instinctive desire. She understands subjectivity formation rather as a process of *language acquisition*.

This is both individual and social, in the sense that language always precedes the individual. For the individual to acquire subjectivity by acquiring language, he or she must therefore enter into the social world which is always already formed. At the same time, to acquire language in this way – and to use it – is also a matter of individual expression, so that the speech act is always structured both socially and personally. Subjectivity is generated only through the speech act, with the implication that self-identification in language also turns out to be a process that occurs dialectically, through the interaction of the socially structured self with a linguistic field.

To acquire language is to enter into what Kristeva calls the *symbolic order*. Like any order, this order has its own rules and logic. The symbolic order of language tends towards a logic of closure. It enables purposive-rational communication founded on logic and rules, rather than emotion or expression.[23] It is this rational purposive communication which enables the social order to be constructed – and Kristeva finds evidence of this in a whole range of institutions from banks and building societies to parliaments and armies, schools and post offices. These are the

[23] *Purposive rationality* is a term coined by the German social philosopher Jürgen Habermas to draw attention to the ways in which the nation-state, the capitalist economy, and modern legal systems operate without regard to human subjectivity. See Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action, Volume One: Reason and the Rationalization of Society* trans. Thomas McCarthy, (London: Heinemann, 1984), pp.217-21.

physical manifestations of the symbolic order, and they are achieved via the action of the symbolic order in and through language.

At the same time, language is not so rigidly structured as to be un-amenable to individual modification. On the contrary, language always precedes the subject, but the way in which the subject uses language is always a subjective process, bearing the hallmarks of individuality. Then again, the process of acquiring an identity is itself always a social and dialectical one, so that there is no such thing as simple individual identity. There is always rather a social process of identity formation.

Instead of a linear narrative of identity formation, Kristeva thus proposes an ongoing *process* of identity that can never be completed. Every speech act – every attempt at subjectivity – bears the stamp of the symbolic order because language is the bearer of that order. Yet each linguistic event also has the capacity to modify or elude the structure of that order, the structure of language itself. Kristeva thus proposes a second term, the *semiotic,* to refer to the capacity of language to elude the symbolic order even while entering it. The *semiotic* is the stamp of individual subjectivity operating within the *symbolic* order. It is never simply sloughed off. The symbolic order does not simply jettison the semiotic. The two elements of linguistic expression exist in ongoing dialectical relation with each other, with the result that the symbolic order – and the social order which is based on it – can always be negated by semiotic inversion. The semiotic in its turn is perpetually being discounted and reformed.

The important point to emerge out of Kristeva's sense of the *semiotic* and the *symbolic* is that language is always polyphonic. It is never a simple instrument of purposive-rational communication and does not simply tend towards a narrative logic of closure. There are no endings in language. There is only an ongoing process.

Raymond Williams shows himself to be aware of this social-subjective dialectic at work in language when he writes, 'The thing that is technically called ***multiaccentuality*** in a word, the fact that there really is more than one proper meaning, all the associations and root qualities and so on – this then becomes crucial, and one begins to see that use of words as almost material.' (*WSW*, p.83).

Williams's interest in language deepened as he read broadly in all kinds of social and cultural theory during the 1970s. Conventionally, this is understood as Williams's engagement with European Marxist theory, and in particular his reading of Goldmann, Althusser, Lukács and Gramsci, culminating in his own study, *Marxism*

and Literature, in 1977.[24] This account of Williams is not untrue, but I am arguing that it is incomplete. The longest section of *Marxism and Literature* is the section on language, and this reveals Williams's cultural materialism to have more in common with the practice of semiotics than has previously been acknowledged.

We know from *Politics and Letters* that Williams was reading the work of social-linguists Rossi-Landi, Chomsky and Benveniste at this time.[25] We know also that he was aware that their linguistic enterprise had been strongly informed by the psychoanalytic work of Jacques Lacan. *Marxism and Literature,* when approached in this light, is not so much the terminus of a long period of engagement with Marxist theory. It is rather the beginning of a process of combining that theory with semiotic work as it had developed after Lacan. Thus when Williams describes language as 'almost material', he is expanding his own understanding of *materialism* to include this important element.

I suggested above that the early stages of Williams's career saw him caught between two poles: idealism and materialism. These modes can be understood alongside Kristeva's sense of the *symbolic* and the *semiotic* respectively. The ***semiotic*** refers to the capacity of language to elude formalisation and hence to resist the rendering passive of communication acts within the symbolic order. Kristeva, like Williams, is interested in the poetics of emergence. In her study *Revolution in Poetic Language*, she asks:

> At what historical moment does social exchange tolerate or necessitate the manifestation of the signifying process in its "poetic" or "esoteric" form? Under what conditions does this "esoterism," in displacing the boundaries of socially established signifying practices, correspond to socio-economic change, and, ultimately, even to revolution? [26]

The historical point at which Kristeva suggests writers began to discover means of harnessing the semiotic in such a way as to produce art that was not orientated solely towards achieving rational communication was the middle of the nineteenth century. The implication of Kristeva's work is that all language and hence

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[24] This is certainly how Terry Eagleton describes it, in his *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), pp.6-8.

[25] Williams mentions Rossi-Landi and Chomsky in *PL* p.182 and p.341 respectively. On Williams and Benveniste, see Michael Moriarty, 'The Longest Cultural Journey: Raymond Williams and French Theory' in *Cultural Materialism: On Raymond Williams* ed. Christopher Prendergast, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), pp.95-96.

[26] Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* trans. Margaret Waller, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p.16.

all writing has at least the potential to act in a polyphonic way, that refuses acquiescence in the symbolic order. The great modernists who developed new literary forms from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards are valued on this account because they take to an extreme what is implicit in such a concept of language: a polyphony of voice and a resistance to narrative closure. Kristeva values the modernist writers Dostoievski, Joyce, Proust, and Kafka highly for this reason. To be a polyphonic writer is to participate in Kristeva's revolution in poetic language. Indeed, it is tantamount to her definition of *modernist.*

That the period of these writers coincides exactly with Raymond Williams's *long revolution* is suggestive. What this account of Kristeva most usefully adds to an understanding of Williams is a sense of individual subjectivity and agency as it is constituted in and through language. This complements Williams's sense of social and collective forms of agency. Indeed, Kristeva reveals the two strands to be related in important ways. Having established the connection between rational communication and the symbolic order in contradistinction to the semiotic state which constantly opposes it, she maps this opposition onto a revolutionary history:

> The problem then was one of finding practices of expenditure capable of confronting the machine, colonial expansion, banks, science, Parliament – those positions of mastery that conceal their violence and pretend to be mere neutral legality. Recovering the subject's vehemence required a descent into the most archaic stage of his positing, one contemporaneous with the positing of social order; it requires a descent into the structural positing of the thetic in language so that violence, surging up through the phonetic, syntactic and logical orders, could reach the symbolic order and the technocratic ideologies that had been built over this violence to ignore or repress it. To penetrate the era, poetry had to disturb the logic that dominated the social order and to do so through that logic itself, by assuming and unravelling its position, its syntheses, and hence the ideologies it controls. [27]

Banks, scientific institutions, and parliaments are all manifestations of the symbolic order. A revolution in poetic language would enable an upsurge in linguistic violence directed against the rules of logic and syntax on which that order is founded. It is a large claim for the radical power of modernist poetry, but as we have seen, a fully material account of literature operates in a paradoxical way, precisely by both under- and over- valuing the power of literature.

When Kristeva writes of the epistemic violence directed by the great modernist poets against the grammatical laws of the age in order to penetrate their

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[27] Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p.83.

logic, there is an undeniable rhetorical element, which we do not find in Williams. The substantive argument, though, is much the same. Williams valorises the writing for a polyphony of voice that he found in Synge and Yeats, Ibsen and Strindberg, and in another period, Dylan Thomas. His evaluation of this work is based precisely on the potential of language to disrupt the symbolic order. He values the poetic emergence of those writers in contradistinction to the parliamentary, nationalist, imperial and authoritarian tendencies that are found in the societies of England and France at the time, and which also characterised the drama produced in those societies. To Williams, as with Kristeva, this socially and politically transgressive element is tantamount to a definition of *modernist* writer. In each case, the polyphonic voice of modernist writing explicitly opposes and undercuts the imperialism of narrative monologue.

The modernist writers emerged as a result of the historic experience of modernisation and turbulent change – as did the comparably modernist writings of Freud. I suggested above that in Williams's account, the psychoanalytic work of Freud and the dramatic work of Strindberg have a common origin. In the face of disorientating change, each writer had pursued the quest for a deeper understanding of identity formation right back into the human mind itself. If Freud can be understood as a kind of modernist writer like Proust or Strindberg, then by the same token, Strindberg can be understood as a kind of psychoanalytic dramatist. By showing that he is interested in the common historical origin of these radically diverse discourses, and by expanding his own understanding of the concept of *materialism* to incorporate the linguistic element, Williams developed cultural materialism as a theory of culture which combines elements of both Marxism and psychoanalysis, to their mutual transformation.

Semiotics provides cultural materialism with a useful framework for understanding certain historical processes. It is not understood as a science as such, in the sense that it is not accorded any greater sense of authority than other kinds of writing. This is precisely how Williams understood the earlier field of psychoanalysis. He saw Freud as a suggestive resource rather than a scientific authority. It is significant that in *Politics and Letters,* Williams makes a similar point about Lacan:

> In the same way the work of Lacan should not be taken as a confirmatory authority, the provision of a framework within which other compositions are read, but rather itself as a composition which we all believe to be important. (*PL,* p.332).

Williams maintains a sense of the importance of understanding psychoanalysis through the modifications to it propounded by Lacan, while at the same time de-privileging Lacan of his authoritative position. In this way, Williams submits the category of *psychoanalysis* to a historical critique:

> I have great respect for Lacan, but the totally uncritical way in which certain of his concepts of phases in language development have been lifted into a theoretical pediment of literary semiotics is absurd, in a world in which there is current scientific work of a non-philological kind with which all such concepts have to be brought into interplay. There has been such justified suspicion on the left of the dominance of behaviourism in the experimental social sciences that there has been an over-accommodation to the claims of psycho-analysis and its various derived schools, which have seemed much nearer and more radical, often precisely because of their literary qualities. What is needed is not a blending of concepts of literature with concepts from Lacan, but an introduction of literary practice to the quite different practice of experimental observation. That would be the materialist recovery. (*PL*, p.341).

Williams had earlier considered precise pieces of *writing* separately from the categorical essence, *literature*. He understands Freud and Lacan in the same way. He considers the *writing* of these psychoanalysts separately from the category of *psychoanalysis*. Thus he is interested in Freud and Lacan as modernist writers, without treating them as scientific authorities in the abstract.[28]

This point emerges from two important late Williams essays. 'Problems of Materialism' was a review of the work of Italian analyst Sebastiano Timpanaro, published in *New Left Review* in 1978, and again in the selection entitled *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (1980). 'Crisis in English Studies' originated as a Cambridge lecture on cultural theory in 1981, and was subsequently published in the volume, *Writing in Society* (1984).

'Problems of Materialism' is Williams's recapitulation of the themes that had previously been latent in his work. Initially, this takes the form of a rejection of the categorical imperative: 'in the very course of opposing systematic universal explanations of many of the common-ground processes, provisional and secular procedures and findings tend to be grouped into what appear but never can be systematic, universal and categorical explanations of the same general kind.' (*PMC*,

[28] Edward Said provides a fuller argument for understanding Freud as a modern *writer* in his *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, (London: Granta, 1997), pp.161-74.

p.103). Williams's early literary work had frustrated him because it left no room to ask the question, *How do people form their judgements of texts?* This is also what he finds in the blind acceptance of behavioural theory, based on a crude version of psychoanalysis. The parallel between how ideas are formed in literature and in science is explicit:

> What has ordinarily happened, even inside 'psychology', with its variation into what are often non-communicating schools, but even more in the general culture, with its eclectic reliance on 'scientifically founded concepts' derived from evidence and procedures never rigorously examined, is the diffusion of a set of systems which even when they are materialist in character – and many of the most widely diffused are evidently and even proudly not – take on the appearance of general humane explanations. Thus one can be asked, in the same mode as for an opinion of a film or a novel, whether one 'accepts the findings' of Freud or of Skinner or of Lacan, without any significant realization that all such 'findings' depend on criteria of evidence, and on the (contested) theoretical presuppositions of both the evidence and the criteria. (These considerations would be relevant, of course, also to the 'opinion' of the film or the novel). (*PMC*, p.117.)

Although Williams conflates the work of very different figures Freud, Lacan and Skinner in 'Problems of Materialism,' his general point is clear. He does not use psychology or psychoanalysis as definitive statements of timeless truths. There is no question to him of simply taking up the findings of psychoanalysis and mobilising them uncritically. To Williams, it is inappropriate to talk of psychoanalysis in terms of its explicit *findings,* for the implication of taking such an approach would be entrapment within a strict genetic, biological and behavioural determinism. Rather than approach the matter in terms of stable findings, then, Williams approaches psychoanalysis as a specific kind of *writing*. As such, he is able to use it to interrogate some of his own concepts and postulates, without registering an unquestioning devotion to the discipline. Throughout 'Problems of Materialism', Williams attempts to restore a sense of the material and ideological processes active behind supposedly neutral science, just as he had earlier done in literature. To do so is to extend the horizons of his understanding of cultural materialism, for the question implicitly raised by Williams throughout the essay is, *Is psychoanalysis a kind of materialism*?

The answer depends on what we understand *by* psychoanalysis. If psychoanalysis is mobilised uncritically through ratifying appeal to its apparently authoritative status, then Williams wants nothing to do with it. For to accept its 'findings' uncritically is to forestall the very questions of *how* ideas are formed which

are the goal of cultural materialism. This uncritical acceptance would be a kind of psychic idealism, and as such, not properly materialist.

If on the other hand psychoanalytic work is taken as a suggestive set of ideas, rather than as the last word on identity formation, then it interests Williams. This is because psychoanalysis so understood opens up a series of questions as to how ideas and images are formed, and this can properly be called materialist. Williams, as we have seen, understood the psychoanalytic project as a kind of literary project, in the sense that it was given over to trying to understand the conditions of modernity out of which it had arisen. As a result, it is not timeless or ahistorical; it has a material and knowable history and a particular material framework within which its 'findings' have to be considered.

No doubt it is because of this ambiguous definition that Williams preferred not to use the term *psychoanalysis* in his own work. Williams concludes 'Problems of Materialism' with an implicit call to broaden the understanding of materialism so that it can incorporate analysis of mental and cognitive processes, without being trapped in the idealist mystifications of psychoanalysis. He concludes, 'analysis of these varying classes of concepts is fundamentally necessary, as a new form of historical and cultural linguistics.' (*PMC,* p.118). Having rejected psychoanalysis as a categorical discipline, he suggests that it would be valuable to hold onto some of the insights of that work, and understand them along side the insights of more conventional literary study. Implicitly, then, Williams is in need of a new term, for a new kind of work, that will enable him to take on the concepts of Freud and Lacan without needing to offer blind obeisance to them.

In this sense, the essay 'Crisis in English Studies' begins where 'Problems of Materialism' concludes. Having originally intended to use the material as a series of lectures on literary theory in Cambridge, Williams was prompted by the MacCabe controversy to bring it forward and deliver it as one condensed lecture.[29] Much of it is a recapitulation of the foregoing themes: the suspicion of psychoanalysis's authoritative claim, tempered by the potential for certain concepts from that work to offer suggestive ways of understanding subjectivity historically. Again, this brings Williams to a point where he needs a new term to refer to those elements of

[29] Fred Inglis discusses this affair in his biography, *Raymond Williams*, (London: Routledge, 1995), pp.278-84.

psychoanalytic work from which he takes real value, in contradistinction to those which he mistrusts.

This time, however, the term is to hand. It is, in short, *semiotics*. This is the term for the practice whereby literary study, psychoanalytic theory, and a whole range of work across all the human sciences, can be brought into useful dialogue with each other without over-valuing disciplinary boundaries or the status of one or two leading figures in each discipline. It is a way of rendering psychoanalysis literary, and of rendering literature amenable to material psychological interrogation. Williams says:

> It was here, perhaps to our mutual surprise, that my work found new points of contact with certain work in more recent *semiotics*. There were still radical differences, especially in their reliance on structural linguistics and psychoanalysis, in particular forms; but I remember saying that a fully historical *semiotics* would be very much the same thing as cultural materialism...(*WS*, p.210, emphasis added).

The embrace of semiotics arises out of Williams's methodological uncertainty as to how exactly to understand the status of psychoanalysis. Whereas psychoanalysis left Williams with the uneasy question, *Is it material or not*?, the interest in *semiotics* is unambiguously materialist. Unlike the tendency in psychoanalysis to posit final answers which cannot be questioned, semiotics represented to Williams a way of asking perpetual questions. In a way, Williams's *Keywords* already is a kind of historical semiotics, and analysis of this text alongside Laplanche and Pontalis's *The Language of Psychoanalysis* would no doubt expand the dialogue between the two fields. A semiotic approach to literature, for example, would enable radical re-readings, where the known and reproduced historical conclusions offered by the text can be short-circuited by the tendency of semiotic analysis to question exactly what it is that is constructed in language:

> Thus the value of literature is precisely that it is one of the areas where the grip of ideology is or can be loosened, because although it cannot escape ideological construction, the point about its literariness is that it is a continual questioning of it internally. So you get readings which are very similar to certain recent *semiotic* readings, where you construct a text and subtext, where you can say, 'this is what is reproduced from the ideology'; but also, 'this is what is incongruously happening in the text which undermines or questions or in certain cases entirely subverts it.' This method has been used in very detailed and interesting analysis. (*WS*, p.208, emphasis added).

It is this sense of subversion that had enabled Julia Kristeva's semiotic critique of Lacan's concept of the symbolic order. The same sense, understood as a resistance to narrative closure and hence to ideological containment, reveals cultural materialism to contain an important semiotic element. Semiotics, as we have seen in the work of Kristeva, explores the radical potential of language to subvert its own authority. This had also been an interest of Raymond Williams's from the earliest stage of his career, when he developed *Keywords* precisely as a means of showing the historic variability and multi-accentuality of language. Thus the work of a semiotician such as Kristeva renders more explicit what had been present in the work of Williams in latent form.

Nation and Negation

At the conclusion of the essay 'Crisis in English Studies', Williams defines cultural materialism as 'analysis of all forms of signification, including quite centrally writing, within the actual means and conditions of their production' (*WS,* p.210). For primarily institutional reasons, the object of Williams's analysis tended to be literature rather than other social forms of signification such as painting, music, art, architecture and so on. Within that context, Williams decentred the concept of *literature*, opening it up to the broadest conceivable definition. This process of inclusion is achieved by converting a pre-conceived notion of *literature* into the more broadly encompassing *writing*. It is the practice of cultural materialism to understand the material and historical processes at work in the activity of producing a passage of writing.

The shift is from a concept of literature which merely reflects the society in which it was produced, as it were passively, to a concept according to which literature itself is part of the material process by which society is generated. In terms expressed by Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukács, it is a shift from a version of literature which merely *describes*, to an idea of communication which actively *narrates*.[30] The crucial distinction is all about seeing literature as an active process, itself contributing to the creation of a social order which cannot be seen as complete without its literature. Once we have grasped a sense of continuing process as opposed to a mechanical

[30] See Lukács, 'Narrate or Describe?' in his *Writer and Critic* trans. Arthur Kahn, (London: Merlin Press, 1978), pp.111-147. Tony Pinkney discusses the distinction in relation to Williams in his *Raymond Williams*, (Bridgend: Seren, 1991), p.72.

model of social determinism, the estimation of the place of literature in society will be radically revised.

By operating in consciousness, literature – along with all other forms of signification - contributes to the active production of a specific social order. It is for this reason that I was able to argue in the Introduction that the history of nation-states is analogous with the history of writing in general and of print capitalism in particular. The nation-state is imagined into being by the writing which imagines its existence. This is as true of literature as of other kinds of writing and other kinds of signification. To understand the material history of writing is to understand the precise formations and relations in which it is produced. The claim that the history of nation-states is inextricable from the history of writing is true only in this full sense: not only the writing, but the material relations involved in the writing, enabled the nation-state to be imagined into existence.

This understanding of how writing operates in consciousness in an active way radically revises the Marxist dichotomy of *base* and *superstructure*. Raymond Williams undertook this revision, partly arising out of his frustration at Marx's perceived failure to produce a theory of cultural forms. Williams argued that cultural forms are themselves material and hence part of the *base* of society. If the activity of the social order is understood as the perpetuation of the nation-state, then as we have seen, this is crucially enabled by the operation of writing and other forms of signification in consciousness. Cultural materialism is the name given to analysis of this process.

Because this approach seeks to analyse the material nature of mental processes, I suggest that cultural materialism is strongly analogous to semiotic analysis – which also investigates the tangibility of mental processes. Julia Kristeva's semiotic analysis implicitly reveals that the symbolic order is continually negated at the very moment of its assertion. I have couched my analysis of Williams's exploration of the Marxist concepts of *base* and *superstructure*, and of the psychoanalytic concept of *semiotics,* on either side of a discussion of Williams's critique of the concept of a *national tradition*. The economic base and the symbolic order are both continually negated. Given that the nation-state is identified in Williams with both the economic base (on one hand) and with the symbolic order (on the other), what does this tell us about the unitary state? Implicitly, the nation-state itself is also always in a process of being negated by the very means which assert its

existence. That is, the ideological bonds which hold the state together have always to be actively generated. At the same time, the act of generating such bonds also throws up the possibility for generating a quite alternative set of ideas and hence for formulating quite different kinds of social and political relationship.

Chapter Two: The Welsh Identity of Raymond Williams

I have been arguing that Raymond Williams's project to articulate a critical cultural materialism could not been complete until he had taken on board a sense of the materiality of language itself. This vital element brought his work into creative dialogue with what he had previously thought of as bourgeois materialism – the work of semiotics, and an interest in the voice.

As with the emergent drama of Scandinavia and Ireland, it was in terms of a polyphony of voices that Williams couched his positive evaluation of the Welsh playwright, Dylan Thomas. Williams praises Thomas's *Under Milk Wood* for 'weaving a pattern of voices, rather than an ordinary conversational sequence' which can 'include not only things said, but things left unsaid, the interpenetration of things seen and imagined.' (*DIB,* 1968, p.217). That is, the play has an important capacity to serve in a subjunctive mood, allowing us to relate what we *know* about Welsh society to how we imagine it *could* be. Williams reminds us that *Under Milk Wood* 'grew out of a broadcast talk... which described the dreams and waking of a small Welsh seaside town.' (*DIB,* p.212). His analysis thus posits a distinct relation between the emergent multiplicity of voices inside the play, and a non-fictional, indeed, a historical, emergence of Welsh consciousness outside the theatre.

The multiplicity of voice relates strongly to the onset of democracy, and the 'dreams and waking' Williams refers to here could refer to twentieth-century Welsh history in general quite as much as to the individual play. The play's capacity to examine an implicit relation between things which have been seen, and things which as yet can only be imagined, has for Williams an important general significance. It hints at the material role played by writing in historical and material processes.

I wish to explore here the relationship between writing and history in the Welsh context. Like his comments on Dylan Thomas, it was very much in terms of the polyphonic voice that Williams stated his praise for the realist writing produced in south Wales during the 1930s. Moreover, when Williams came to write his own novels, he did so consciously in that tradition of socialist critical realism. Throughout this chapter, then, I wish to consider the relationship that exists between Williams's work and that earlier body of Welsh industrial writing.

The Welsh Industrial Novel

Raymond Williams discusses the phenomenon of Welsh industrial writing in two major essays. 'The Welsh Industrial Novel' was prepared as the inaugural Gwyn Jones lecture at Cardiff in 1978. 'Working-Class, Proletarian, Socialist: Problems in Some Welsh Novels' was originally published in an anthology of articles about British working-class fiction in 1982.[1] Both pieces were recently reprinted in *Who Speaks for Wales?*

'The Welsh Industrial Novel' opens in characteristic Williams fashion, with an examination of different definitions of the genre. This is more or less the substance of the whole article, with questions of definition giving way to a relatively brief discussion of several different novelists: Gwyn Jones, Lewis Jones, Jack Jones, Alexander Cordell and Gwyn Thomas. 'Working-Class, Proletarian, Socialist' is a more theoretical take on the historical emergence of the writing in question.

Williams's important definition of industrial writing is as follows. It is a kind of writing set in and around the kinds of place where industrial work takes place: mines, factories and mills. Its main characters are typically involved in this kind of work. In a fuller version of the industrial novel, the characters are also shown to inhabit typical life-styles accompanying their working life, so that their leisure, their means of interaction, and their ways of relating to one another are also seen to be characteristic of the industrial world to which they belong:

> What basically informs the industrial novel, as distinct from other kinds of fiction? Both the realist and the naturalist novel, more generally, had been predicated on the distinctive assumption... that the lives of individuals, however intensely and personally realized, are not just influenced but in certain crucial ways formed by general social relations. Thus industrial work, and its characteristic places and communities, are not just a new background: a new 'setting' for a story. In the true industrial novel they are seen as formative.[2]

This last point is important, for it has an important bearing on the fullest available definition of the *industrial novel.* What matters most is not the industrial work *per se.* Rather, the important ingredient is the impact of this on the lives of the people. Thus, the mine, or the factory, or the mill, is not mere background setting for the unfolding of a separate action. These are important inasmuch as their operations

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[1] See *The Socialist Novel in Britain* ed. H. Gustav Klaus, (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), pp.110-21.
[2] Williams, 'The Welsh Industrial Novel' in *Who Speaks for Wales?* p.103. Cited hereafter as 'Welsh Industrial Novel.'

and the relations they produce are shown to have a strong impact on the kind of society in which the action takes place. As a result of this formative element, the place of work takes on some of the properties of a character within the novel: it relates to the people and to their lives, and demonstrates that those lives are always involved in a process of change. 'Social relations are not assumed, are not static, are not conventions within which the tale of a marriage or an inheritance or an adventure can go its own way. The working society – actual work, actual relations, an actual and visibly altered place – is in the industrial novel central.' ('Welsh Industrial Novel,' p.103).

The brief references Williams makes here to marriage, inheritance and adventure are important, because they show him associating the Welsh industrial novel with a similar body of work that had been produced in England during the early industrial revolution. Williams had shown right back in *The Long Revolution* that unlikely marriages, inheritances, and overseas emigration are the desperate stratagems by which Victorian novelists sought to foreclose the troubling questions of social relationship which their novels had raised (*LR*, pp.82-83). This was the case in *Mary Barton, Shirley, Hard Times* and *Vanity Fair*. The Welsh industrial novel too has certain conventions of its own, as we shall see.

Williams underlines the shared genealogy of this classic English writing with the Welsh industrial novel, when he writes, 'the first phase of the industrial novel is a particular crystallization within English culture, from the mid-1840s to the mid-1850s, when a group of middle-class novelists, for the most part not themselves living in the industrial areas, began to explore this turbulent human world.' ('Welsh Industrial Novel,' pp.96-97). The implicit kinship between forms of fiction produced in England in the 1840s and south Wales in the 1930s is this: that in each case, rapid industrialisation had thrown up a changed set of social relationships, which the novelists in question used their writing actively to explore.

If there is this shared historical genealogy, then there is also an important historical difference between the Welsh writing of the 1930s and the better-known English examples of the 1840s. As Williams point out, Gaskell, the Brontës, Dickens and Thackeray were prominent members of the *middle class*. They did not belong to industrial communities and were certainly not involved in industrial work themselves.

The Welsh writers of the 1930s, by contrast, belonged to the communities of which they wrote. For the most part, they had also actively laboured in the kind of

work their novels narrate. This is not simply an interesting biographical detail, but an important theoretical element in establishing the definition of the Welsh industrial novel. Thus the Welsh industrial novels, 'unlike the English nineteenth-century examples... are, in majority, written from inside the industrial communities; they are working-class novels in the new and distinctive twentieth-century sense.' ('Welsh Industrial Novel,' p.100). It is this written-from-within the working class element that gives the industrial writing produced in depression era south Wales its distinctive character. Williams states the difference more succinctly in 'Working-Class, Proletarian, Socialist: Problems in Some Welsh Novels,' when he writes, 'the writers and intellectuals of twentieth-century Wales are much more often working class in origin than their twentieth-century English counterparts.'[3]

The writers of Welsh industrial fiction were more directly involved not simply with the work, but also with the broader lives, relationships and historical currents, of which their novels treat. This opens up a further important bearing in the genealogy of the form, and this is again best demonstrated in contradistinction to the industrial writing of the English 1840s. Since Dickens and Gaskell were not intimately involved in the matters of which they treat, there is a tendency to abstraction in their work. This can be seen in the portrayal of Dickens's Coketown or the allegories of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. The history of the industrial revolution as an ongoing process is not realised in specific form within these novels. History is the vague and sublime process that is tangibly happening – somewhere else.

The Welsh industrial novel is not like this. Its writers – like its protagonists – are only too involved in the historical matters of which they write. As a result, there is not this sense of a separation from history. History enters the novels in a specific and verifiable – as opposed to an abstract and absent – way. The novels were written during a period of economic depression, which the writers sought to understand and, by understanding, ease. Neither the historical times nor the geographical locations are abstracted out of the novels in question. Gwyn Thomas's *All Things Betray Thee* demonstrably takes place in the Merthyr of the 1830s. Gwyn Jones's *Times Like These* again can be precisely placed, in the Rhondda Valley, in the 1920s. Moreover, since many of these novels were written during the depression of the 1920s and 30s, it is this historic event that the novels continually invoke. Williams concludes:

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[3] Williams, 'Working-Class, Proletarian, Socialist: Problems in Some Welsh Novels' in *Who Speaks for Wales?* p.152. Cited hereafter as 'Working-Class, Proletarian, Socialist.'

> So then, if we have learned to look in this way, it is no surprise to find at the centre of so many of the Welsh industrial novels of this period one decisive experience: the general strike of 1926 in its specifically Welsh form; that is to say, the general strike followed by the long months of the miners' lockout, by the long years of depression, and very deeply, by the pervasive sense of defeat. ('Welsh Industrial Novel,' p.104).

The precise historic and geographical placing of these novels in the Welsh valleys in 1926 gives them a historical specificity that it lacking in say *Hard Times* or *Mary Barton*. Examples Williams gives of this kind of fiction are Gwyn Jones, *Times Like These* (1936); Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy* (1937) and *We Live* (1939); and Jack Jones, *Black Parade* (1935). I shall explore below the extent to which Williams too used this precise placing, and the extent to which he did so as a means of asserting the continuity of his own work with that earlier writing. When Williams set his own novel, *Border Country,* around the general strike, he placed himself squarely in the tradition of Welsh industrial writing.[4]

The general strike of 1926 is a precise crystallization of what, in the context of English writing, had been a much more general historical process in the 1840s: industrialisation and the accretion of a specific capitalist order in which the majority were suffering. The English novelists whom Williams had earlier examined appeared to sympathise with this suffering. Yet within the structure of their own society, they were unable or unwilling to imagine any really viable alternatives to it. Thus as Williams noted, the conventions on which their novels depend are absurd inheritance, unlikely marriage, and overseas adventure in the colonies. These stratagems provide narrative closure within the novels that would otherwise lack such closure. They do so very clearly in favour of the existing class structure and of the ruling and owning class. Solving the problems of inequality in the society was far more difficult.

The recurring conventions in the Welsh industrial novel are quite different. I suggest that the conventions at work here are used in order to find ways of identifying a specific future for the society in which the novels were written. This, as we have seen, was particularly difficult in the work of the 1840s.

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[4] Laura di Michele has argued that Williams made the general strike the climax to *Border Country* for this reason. See her 'Autobiography and the "Structure of Feeling" in *Border Country'* in *Views Beyond the Border Country: Raymond Williams and Cultural Politics* ed. Dennis L. Dworkin and Leslie G. Roman, (New York: Routledge, 1993), p.26.

The Welsh industrial novels typically begin at or shortly after the moment of industrialisation of the Welsh valleys. The rapid industrialisation that occurs is dangerous and unchecked, in a world governed by little social legislation, so that the first recurring convention of the Welsh industrial novel is the *mining disaster* (Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy*; Jack Jones, *Bidden to the Feast*; Rhys Davies, *Jubilee Blues*; Menna Gallie, *The Small Mine*). In each case, any attempt at establishing the legal responsibility of the colliery owners for the disaster that has occurred is rapidly quashed by a nominal trial, as in Lewis Jones's *Cwmardy*.

The convention of the industrial disaster, in other words, is a way of exploring the gradual development of class consciousness in the south Wales valleys. The paternalism of the ruling class is gradually eroded as the workers learn by experience that the colliery owners do not necessarily know what is best for the men. The myth that by benefiting their masters, the workers will benefit themselves, is rolled back by a deepening awareness that there is no common interest.

If the convention of the *mining disaster* introduces this element of consciousness in the Welsh industrial novel, then other conventions take it to an extreme form. Almost invariably in these novels, there is the portrayal of a *strike action* held in protest against low wages and high rents (Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy*; Jack Jones, *Black Parade, Bidden to the Feast*; Gwyn Thomas, *All Things Betray Thee*; Rhys Davies, *A Time to Laugh, Jubilee Blues*). At the same time, many of the novels are set at a historical period of war overseas – either the Boer War, or the First World War. Another feature of Welsh industrial writing is the *absent relative* who has *gone to fight in the war*. This was historically likely, in an area of depression and low employment, and of *de facto* economic conscription.

Along with the *strike action* and the *conscripted relative*, a concurrent element of much of the Welsh industrial writing is the portrayal of labour militancy and open class conflict. This is portrayed within the novels via the response to the strike actions by the ruling class. Time and again, the strike is broken through the mobilisation of *military force*. This happens in Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy*; Jack Jones, *Black Parade*; Rhys Davies, *A Time to Laugh* and *Jubilee Blues*; and Gwyn Thomas, *All Things Betray Thee*.

The effect of these simultaneous actions is again consciousness-raising. On the one hand, the workers are supposed to believe that their masters know best. On the other hand, this belief is shattered by the turbulent experiences of the characters. The

absent relatives are conscripted into the army through economic imperative. That same army is sent in to crush the strike in which that relative's family members are involved. The society is turned against itself. This forces the characters to ask much deeper questions about their place in society, and about their loyalty and solidarity.

This questioning of loyalty is intensified by another frequent convention of the Welsh industrial novel – *the coronation.* In *Cwmardy, Black Parade, A Time to Laugh* and *Jubilee Blues,* the coronation of a new English monarch is portrayed with profound social and historical ambivalence. The workers are invited to feel loyalty to this alien order, its empire and its monuments, at the same time that their experiences could hardly be said to cultivate such loyalty. In each case, the crowd who gather on coronation day enthusiastically celebrate the occasion. It is only one or two figures on the side who strike a note of discord. These figures would be historically very important, as we shall see.

The conventions I have identified within the Welsh industrial novel are the *mining disaster*; *the strike*; *the overseas war*; *the turning of the army against strikers*; and the *coronation*. These are precise equivalents to the conventions of *marriage*; *inheritance* and *escape into the colonies* that Raymond Williams believed characterised the English industrial writing of the 1840s. There is however one striking contrast. Those conventions tended towards a narrative closure where all social relations – and the social order itself – are rendered static and unvarying. The conventions of the Welsh industrial novel, written as they are from a working-class and socialist perspective – refuse to cohere in this way. The novels do not read like novels. At least, they do not 'end' with the kind of 'closure' that we find in *Mary Barton*. The Welsh novels in question then seem more open-ended, ambiguous, and in that sense more 'literary' than the better-known examples of the 1840s. Yet a century and a half of canonisation has come to exactly that opposite conclusion: that the fiction of the 1840s is to be valued as great literature, whereas the work of 1930s Wales is barely worth reading. What is the reason for this?

Raymond Williams attempts to answer this question throughout the slightly later essay, 'Working-Class, Proletarian, Socialist: Problems in Some Welsh Novels.' Williams provides two reasons why Welsh writers had rarely been able to produce works of sufficient merit to attract the 'literary' tag. One of them is the unfamiliarity inside Wales of the prose narrative form. After all, writing in English in Wales had really only begun to take off in the twentieth century. Although there were fifteen

centuries of Welsh-language writing prior to this, the Welsh tradition was primarily a poetic one. As Williams says, it was 'a many-sided tradition which did not, however, include realist prose narrative. By the twentieth century that may have been old to the English; it was new to us.' ('Working-Class, Proletarian, Socialist', p.150). The shift in Welsh history which saw Welsh become the minority language had occurred so rapidly that the impact of the Welsh literary tradition was to leave the new English speakers hamstrung, because the new language brought with it new literary forms – especially the novel – which had not existed in the old language and hence were unfamiliar to the general culture of Wales.[5]

More important, of course, was a pre-conceived idea of the *literary*. This takes Williams into examination of the categories I examined in Chapter One: 'literature' and 'national tradition.' In contrast to the primarily ruling-class tradition of English literature, Williams knows that there was a long-established tradition of writing produced from within the working class. This writing existed mainly in various forms of autobiography: diaries, letters and journals. That it happened not to include novels is an irrelevance to Williams. This underlines the extent to which the unfamiliarity of the novel form in Wales was related both to the class make-up of the population *and* to the linguistic inheritance which rendered that form unfamiliar. It is this distinctive historical inheritance that renders the Welsh industrial form distinct within the evolution of working-class writing more generally. But that writing had always been there:

> all through the nineteenth century, there were working-class writers. Only they were rarely writing novels. Verse of several kinds, and some vigorous work-songs. In prose, pamphlets, memoirs, autobiographies. That is either writing in the direct service of the cause, or writing as a direct record of it. ('Working-Class, Proletarian, Socialist', p.151).

Of course there is no simple reason why members of the working class were not able to write novels. This undoubtedly takes us into a whole nexus of issues including worker education, political formations, and local communities. We can however discuss general trends, and it is clear that the general trend from the Victorian period onwards was for adult workers to seek to educate themselves to the greatest possible

[5] Dai Smith has analysed the relationship of industrialisation to new kinds of writing produced in Wales in his 'Relating to Wales' in *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives* ed. Terry Eagleton, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), pp.34-53. See especially p.37.

extent and to write about their own experiences. The question as to whether this writing can be considered novelistic is then irrelevant. What matters is that it was written at all. Thus the Welsh industrial novels are virtually autobiographical: Lewis Jones, Jack Jones and the others wrote directly of their own daily lives, while B.L. Coombes's *These Poor Hands* (1939) is explicitly an autobiography. An equivalent example of an English industrial autobiography written from within the working class of the 1840s would be Alexander Somerville's *Autobiography of a Working Man* (1848) – which Williams discusses with enthusiasm in *The Country and The City.*[6]

The Welsh industrial novel flowered in depression-era south Wales in the 1930s. It was a period of poverty, poor standards of public health, social unrest, and low rates of education. These are not favourable conditions for producing great literature. Novels or not, literature or not, the Welsh industrial writing of the 1930s was valuable both because it recorded a precise experience and because it enabled those involved in it to develop their own consciousness. The flowering of the Welsh industrial novel - such as it was - is then perhaps best understood using Raymond Williams's concept of a 'formation':

> a working class, at its most general, and in any socialist perspective, is really a *formation* within a much wider system: not only the much wider national and international economy; but also the relations between classes, including that other alien class, those other alien or indeterminate or irrelevant classes. ('Working-Class, Proletarian, Socialist', p.153, emphasis added).

Formation is the term Williams uses for a body of work, or group of people involved in a body of work, who have no formal, official or institutional affiliation with each other, yet who nevertheless evince structurally homologous tendencies within the general scope of their work. There is no necessary reason for the writers, artists or intellectuals within a formation to have collaborated on joint projects, or even to have met each other at all, in order to evince such a congruity. The whole idea of a 'formation' is that it was developed in contradistinction to just such officially sanctioned or institutional partnerships.

As an analytic concept, the advantage of using the idea of a *formation* is that it allows us to consider similar work being produced within a specific society at a specific moment, even if, strictly speaking, there is no extant relation between the

[6] Williams, *The Country and The City,* (London: Hogarth, 1985), p.189. Cited hereafter as *CC.*

components of which that work is comprised. It has a further advantage of empowering unofficial or non-institutional kinds of work. Williams writes:

> This is why, in any analysis, we have also to include *formations*. These are most recognisable as conscious movements and tendencies (literary, artistic, philosophical or scientific) which can usually be readily discerned after their formative productions. Often, when we look further, we find that these are articulations of much wider effective formations which can by no means be identified with formal institutions, or their formal meanings and values, and which can sometimes even be positively contrasted with them. (*ML*, p.119).

This definition depends on a circular argument: A formation is defined as an informal and extra-institutional articulation of a 'much wider effective formation.' What Williams seems to mean is that the informal formation can be taken as an association which has not been formally made by its members. Rather, a group of writers becomes identified as a 'formation' by an exterior commentator, outside the formation itself, on the basis of the perceived overlap of interests or concerns among the members. Williams then takes 'formation' to be a measure of wider tendencies and experiences operating in the broader society of which the formation is a part. Examples he gives elsewhere of this kind of formation are the political brotherhood that met around William Godwin in the late eighteenth century, and the 'Bloomsbury' group of intellectuals, including Virginia Woolf, E.M. Forster and J.M. Keynes, in the 1920s.[7]

The Welsh industrial novel is just such a formation. It incorporates writers as diverse as Lewis Jones, Jack Jones, Gwyn Jones, Gwyn Thomas and Menna Gallie. These are writers of no common institutional origin and who were not necessarily personally acquainted. Their work is certainly not collaborative in the institutional sense. These novelists comprise a 'formation' in the sense that their work can be taken as a general articulation of even more general historical tendencies.

If these novels can be judged somewhat deficient in terms of literary quality, this is because Wales in the 1930s was waiting for history to provide a more favourable context for the production of great literature. When the general broadening of the educational franchise, combined with a favourable family and school environment, gave Williams the chance to go to Cambridge and become a

[7] See Williams, *Culture*, (Glasgow: Fontana, 1981), pp.74-83.

professional man of letters, in 1939, he took it. His novels (1960-90) are direct successors to the tradition of industrial writing, as I shall now show.

Border Country and Unfinished Narrative

The realist texts Williams discusses in 'The Welsh Industrial Novel' and 'Working-Class, Proletarian, Socialist' all have the capacity to help readers develop a critical consciousness. This is also the case in Raymond Williams's autobiographical first novel, *Border Country* (1960).

The novel opens with Matthew Price, a university lecturer in London, being summoned back to his family home in Glynmawr to attend to the illness of his elderly father, Harry. As he travels home, a series of flashbacks narrate Matthew's childhood life in that Welsh borders village: living through the general strike and the depression of the 1930s, up to the triumphant climax of Part One, which describes the winning by Matthew of a place at Cambridge University and his departure to it.

Those sections of the novel which are set in the present make it clear that Matthew has lost some of the closeness with which he had earlier related to the people of Glynmawr. This is underlined by the fact that they continue to refer to him by his childhood name, Will, whereas after going to Cambridge, he had adopted the more adult name, Matthew. The scenes where he comes across his former sweetheart, Eira, are frigid and bitter. Most revealing of all is how the returning Matthew relates to his father's old friend, the petty businessman Morgan Rosser.

Border Country does not simply narrate a home-coming. It profoundly dramatises the difficulties involved *both* in leaving a familiar home *and* in returning, and of continuing to return. Matthew Price in his adult life must live on both sides of the border, in metropolitan London and local Glynmawr, without ever belonging in either. He exists in a perpetual border zone, shuttling between different places, different relationships, and different ways of life.

An important example of this occurs at the climax of the novel. The returning Matthew attempts to rationalise to Morgan Rosser his rejection of his father's way of life. The father, Harry, has continued to work on the railways in Glynmawr all his life. Matthew has gone away to receive an education, and chosen to pursue a quite

different career. Matthew explains that it is not that he has rejected his father, but that he has chosen a different kind of work:

> a father is more than a person, he's in fact a society, the thing you grow up into. For us, perhaps, that is the way to put it. We've been moved and grown into a different society. We keep the relationship, but don't take over the work. We have, you might say, a personal father but no social father. What they offer us, where we go, we reject.[8]

As Matthew's rejection of his father's way of life suggests, there is continual interplay between different experiences. This is manifested in the writing as a relationship between industry and education, standing in for the relationship between father and son. Matthew insists that he has not rejected his father as a person; merely as a destination.[9] The nature of this relationship is both embracing and antagonistic, and the antagonism can never finally be resolved. Thus the climatic scene between Matthew and Morgan Rosser concludes without a sense of closure:

> 'It's late. I'd better be going.'
> 'With nothing finished?'
> 'We shan't finish this, Will. It's a life time.' (*BC,* p.277).

Morgan tells Will that this dialogue cannot be resolved because it is in the nature of dialogue to be open-ended and ongoing. The novel itself similarly refuses to draw firm conclusions. The continual shuttling back and fore, across the borderland and between different ways of life, is epitomised by the disjointed manner in which *Border Country* concludes. It appears as though Harry has recovered from illness, and Matthew catches the train back to London, to his own wife and children. However, he only gets as far as Newport, before a message catches up with him: Harry has suffered a relapse, and in fact, is soon dead.

At the funeral, Matthew meets the vicar Pugh for the first time in years. It was Pugh who had originally advised the young Will/ Matthew to go away to Cambridge. Rather as though he has waited years to ask the question, Pugh asks Matthew if the universities really are the great institutions he had wanted them to be. Matthew's reply is vague:

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[8] Williams, *Border* Country, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), p.271. Cited hereafter as *BC.*
[9] Earlier Marxist Ralph Fox similarly suggested that the individual also has two histories, personal and social. See his *The Novel and the People,* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979), p.34.

> 'I don't know. Yes, in many ways. But at times it makes sense, this dialogue of the centuries. As an outpost of that it's important: keeping that conversation alive. And then clarifying, sometimes, where we live ourselves.' (*BC,* p.321).

Rather than answering the question about Cambridge, Matthew suggests an abstract metaphor. The metaphor he uses is one of dialogue: the encounter between different places, different peoples, and even different histories. This is appropriate, for it has in effect been Matthew's life. He understands the university as it relates to these other peoples and places which appear distant from it. I shall develop this idea in more detail in Chapter Three, where I argue that this is precisely how Raymond Williams understood universities.

Border Country concludes without the sense of an ending. There is considerable irony in this, for there can be few more final events in life than that which concludes the novel: a funeral. Yet even here, we detect a distinct resistance to narrative closure. On the eve of Harry's funeral, all of his relatives stay at the Price house. Feeling cut off from the other mourners, Matthew discusses his emotional response to his father's death with his cousin, Glynis:

> 'If I say what I feel I find many of my feelings are common.'
> 'I guessed that. It's what they said about Uncle. Your Dad.'
> 'Did they say that?'
> 'Yes, he always was a bit of a stranger.' (*BC,* p.323).

The novel implicitly concludes with a pair of questions: Who was Harry? Who is Will? Their subjectivity cannot be understood aside from a social process of identity formation which can never end. This process of social-individuation is the one whereby Matthew discovers that his most personal and seemingly unshared feelings are also very commonly felt. The fact that Harry Price is described as 'a bit of a stranger' has the effect of positing the heart of the novel as something ultimately unknowable, as a mystery. This form allowed Raymond Williams to explore the ongoing and open-ended nature of subjectivity formation. For as I shall show, throughout Williams's fiction, it is when the mystery appears to be solved that all the real questions of identity and subjectivity begin. As Williams's novels became more ambitious, he would return to this structure again and again.

The 'Simple' Mystery: *Manod*

In *Border Country,* Raymond Williams poses the relationship between father and son as a mystery which can never really be solved. His subsequent novels elaborate on this basic mystery structure, where conclusions fail to offer closure. *The Volunteers* (1978), *The Fight for Manod* (1979), and *Loyalties* (1985) are all more explicitly investigation or thriller novels.

In Chapter Four, I shall show that *The Volunteers* is a political thriller, in which an investigative journalist gets drawn into all sorts of deeper questions than the matter primarily under investigation. These are questions about his own identity and his own affiliation. This will enable me to argue that *The Volunteers* is a kind of postcolonial novel, for as R. Radhakrishnan says, it is in postcolonial societies that deep-rooted questions of identity are most painfully in need of answer.[10]

The Fight for Manod can be understood as a thriller in the sense that it is again a novel combining political machination and intrigue with a process of investigation: in this case, of industrial espionage. Finally, *Loyalties* is a novel that poses the relationship between two of its main characters as a central mystery, which is investigated by both protagonist and reader – again, with a sense of political intrigue. Raymond Williams appears to have found the investigation plot a useful device by which he could put various questions to a contemporary social order. *The Fight for Manod* is the novel where Williams really begins to use that plot to explore questions of commitment and belonging.

At the start of *The Fight for Manod,* Matthew Price and Peter Owen arrive in the depressed Afren Valley near Gwenton, Wales, as consultants to the Whitehall government on a proposed project to develop a new city there: Manod. In his role of consultant, Price will live there for a year to see if the project is viable. He discovers that the local builder, Dance, has already started to try and manoeuvre his company into a position from which he will be able to profit from the Manod project by winning certain important contracts.

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[10] Radhakrishnan, 'Cultural Theory and the Politics of Location' in *Views Beyond the Border Country: Raymond Williams and Cultural Politics* ed. Dennis Dworkin and Leslie Roman, (New York: Routledge, 1993), p.291.

The local people are suspicious. Modlen Jenkins asks Matthew about the Manod project. Since she has only heard a very general whisper about what is being planned, she is unable to ask the right questions: she does not know what to ask. All she can do is ask in very generalised terms if the planned development – whatever it is – will have any real impact on Pont Afren:

> 'Will it be round here then?'
> 'Well, along the Afren, that's the general idea. That is, if it ever gets built.'
> 'Only I hope it's round here. Like we need it at Manod, bring a bit of life.'
> She shifted her bag on her knees. He glanced across at her as the pitch straightened.
> 'You want it to come them?'
> 'We want more people anyhow. And some work for us here.'[11]

Modlen both wants and does not want the project to come to fruition. Certainly she is suspicious of outside influence on the life of the valley. Yet she also does not want to feel that the valley is missing out on what is happening. She does not know what to make of it all, does not know how to ask the appropriate questions to allay her anxieties, and so falls back on a kind of defensive hostility.

This is the general reaction encountered by Matthew and Peter. District Planning Officer Bryn Walters finds it hard to believe that Price is neither for nor against the project, but only consulting. Bryn discusses the work of Matthew's superior, Robert Lane, in a way that clearly shows that he is suspicious of both Lane and Matthew. Matthew tries to establish Lane's credentials as an urban planner through recourse to Lane's list of academic publications. Walters responds:

> 'Yes, I read the big one soon after it came out. I've been meaning to read it again. The title fascinated me: *Social Method.* Of course in work like my own...'
> 'Yes?'
> 'I see social method in the raw. It cuts down the time for books.'
> He again stared intently.
> 'The rawer the practice,' Matthew said, 'the more need for theory.'
> 'Of course, of course. A very gifted man.' (*FM,* p.31).

Bryn is wary of the likelihood of the Afren valley being manipulated from outside. He sees Price as an alien intellectual; the kind that disavows in advance earnest questioning or exploration of political commitments. There is a great irony in the suspicion which Price and Owen provoke. Within the parameters of the

[11] Williams, *The Fight for Manod*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1979), p.28. Cited hereafter as *FM.*

investigative thriller genre that Williams is using, their work should point through Matthew and Peter to the shadowy goings on at Whitehall which inform the Manod project and hence the novel. Yet this is exactly what does not happen, because of the locally fixed suspicion of Matthew and Peter, which in effect posits them as the dangerous outsiders to be distrusted, rather than the real manipulators in government.

The already-existing tendency to see Peter and Matthew as alien intellectuals is exploited by the builder, Dance, in order to throw the community behind his development project. When Matthew refuses what amounts to a bribe from Dance, Dance refuses to see his offer as a bribe. He construes his offer instead as the expression of a warm and well-motivated feeling of good-will, which would be understood by the members of the tightly-bonded community of Pont Afren, but which the alien interlopers Price and Owen cannot appreciate:

> 'It's not our way, you know that,' he said hoarsely.
> 'Not whose way?'
> 'Not our way, you know what I mean. Not how we live down here and get on with each other, because this is our place, this is all we have.'
> 'I could comment on that but I won't.'
> 'You see. No comment. You've learned up all that. So that you can't talk to us, not as if you're one of us. You've come back as an official, one of the government's people. One of this caste that controls us, but that lives off our living.' (*FM*, p.170).

It is an ironic turning of the tables. Dance as one of the people makes Price seem the villain. This poses Price's presence in the valley as a mystery. Dance states this explicitly, 'a mystery from the beginning, your coming to Manod' (*FM,* p.169). He is only echoing Bryn's suspicion of Matthew's political commitment. Yet to us as readers he is not a mystery. We are familiar with both Price and Owen from *Border Country* and Williams's second novel, *Second Generation*, and do not feel that there is anything untoward in their presence.

Thus the mystery of the novel is not for us the same mystery as that experienced by the characters contained within it. Williams uses the mystery plot to refract different commitments across the text. *The Fight for Manod* enacts a process of investigation and detection, where the conclusion of the investigation leads not to known answers but to endless questions. Unlike the classic detective novel, here, where detection concludes, uncertainty begins.

The mystery of Matthew and Peter gives way to the deeper mystery of Dance and his business activities. Price and Owen investigate every aspect of the Manod project. They discover that it has been encouraged by Dance. He has set up 'Afren Agricultural Holdings' (*FM,* p.123), part of the larger Anglo Belgian Community Developments, or A.B.C.D. (*FM,* p.157), to buy up land so that he is well-placed to take advantage of the development – once government investment gets it off the ground. Peter Owen realises that this could only be done if the information about the development was leaked from the relevant government department to the company. He calls this 'an organized rip-off for an oil company subsidiary and a merchant bank' (*FM,* p.192), because it is in effect an attempt to finance a private venture out of the public purse. In the final climactic meeting of consultants, Owen storms out and resigns because he refuses to accept an official cover-up.

More explicitly than *Border Country,* this is a thriller. Dance's mysterious dealings are more dramatic than the mystery of Matthew Price's relationship with his father. The investigation carried out by Price and Owen takes them into the world of secret insider deals, tantamount to industrial espionage. The cover-ups and cloud of secrecy go all the way to the highest echelons of government.

Yet the mystery is comparatively easily solved. A few telephone calls, a few meetings and one trip each to London and Antwerp are all it takes Price and Owen to point the finger at the mysterious figure of Dance. Dance seems oleaginous and despicable from the beginning: Susan Price instinctively refuses to 'trust' him (*FM,* p.123), while Matthew tells her that he thinks Dance a 'dreadful man' (*FM,* p.166). Dance is a 'know-all' (*FM,* p.40) and seems 'shady' (*FM* p.143). At Megan and Ivor's wedding he stands 'alone' in a corner while the other guests – dance (*FM,* p.164). From the beginning, he seems like a conventional novel villain to us, and sure enough, he turns out to be the villain. There are no complications in the investigation and none of the plot twists we might expect of a political thriller.

What then is the point of envisaging the plot as a process of detection? I would argue that the point is that it opens up questions. The ease with which the A.B.C.D. company is exposed forces us to ask not 'what is this sinister industrial crook doing?' Rather, as soon as we know this, we ask 'what can it mean for us?' This is more or less the conclusion – if conclusion is the word – that Matthew and Peter come to: that they know exactly what has been happening, but it is exactly then that 'the problems start' (*FM,* p.135). The process of investigation does not end with answers, but with

questions. All they can do then is 'use the inquiry to develop an alternative strategy' (*FM,* p.137). This strategy it seems will be one of asking troubling questions about the suspicious deal that is going through, or using the answers provided by the inquiry to open up those questions. This is the very strategy that had not been available to Modlen Jenkins, who did not know what questions to ask.

Analysis does not posit stable answers that are presented unproblematically. Knowing what Dance is up to does not enable Owen and Price to combat his ruthless measures, and does not enable them to beat him. Investigation, and the novel, therefore break off not with answers, but implicitly with a question: if knowing how multinational capital works alone is not enough to defeat its power, what will? It is when the positing of stable answers and meanings breaks down that the much more complicated and interminable process of keeping questions open begins.

A 'Full Blankness': *Loyalties*

In Williams's novel *Loyalties* (1985), what appears to be the end of the investigation again turns out to be the opening up of questions rather than the positing of answers. The novel follows two families over the course of several generations. Each episode is associated with a precise historical moment. The first section, 1936-37, ties together the political culture of south Wales with the onset of the Spanish civil war, thus placing the quest for socialism in a wider context. The third section, 1955-56, demonstrates the involvement of political activists in London with what is happening during the Suez crisis overseas. The final section is set during the miners' strike in 1985. Williams uses these events both to open up questions about loyalty and commitment, and to affirm his own loyalty to that earlier generation of Welsh socialist writers who had written similar work.

Loyalties opens in Danycapel, south Wales, in 1936. Emma Braose, her brother Norman, and their associates Georgi and Mark Ryder have come to the Welsh valleys for a socialist conference, having met at Cambridge and in Vienna – where Emma's parents were in the diplomatic service. Among the local delegates at the conference are Bert Lewis and the brother and sister Jim and Nesta Pritchard.

Norman has an affair with Nesta, who becomes pregnant. Emma and the Communist Party pressure Norman to give up this inexperienced working-class girl.

Emma thus comes to the Pritchard family and arranges for the child to be born in Westridge nursing home. Abandoned by Norman, Nesta subsequently marries Bert Lewis, who has suffered horrific facial injuries in a tank battle in Normandy. When Nesta visits him in Salisbury American Hospital, she brings with her his adopted son, Gwyn (Nesta's child by Norman) and also Dic, a second son who has been born to Bert and Nesta.

In the establishment figure of Norman Braose, and the scarred working-class man Bert Lewis, Gwyn clearly has two different kinds of father. This relates the structure of *Loyalties* to that earlier structure of *Border Country*, where Matthew Price had two fathers, a personal father and a social father. In *Loyalties*, Williams does not clearly delineate each role. It is tempting to equate Bert with the personal father and Braose with the social father. Yet the actions of Norman Braose impact on Gwyn in a direct way throughout his life. Likewise, the absence of Bert fighting in the war during Gwyn's infancy gives him a social and historical perspective on the family's development, which is not then the exclusive domain of the upper-class figure Braose. In this way, Braose and Bert can both be said to occupy each role: personal and social father. The antagonism between the two strongly recalls that of *Border Country*. In *Loyalties*, this becomes transposed into an examination of how individual ambition relates to social and political commitment, and opens up the question, Where does Gwyn's loyalty lie?

In the 1968 section, Gwyn and his half-brother Dic go on an anti-Vietnam protest, where Dic is arrested and Gwyn must pay a fine for his release. This is arranged by the mysterious American Monkey Pitter, a sometime colleague of Norman's. In fact, Monkey and Norman's relationship is the mystery of the novel. It also represents a complication of the doubled filial relationship. Arguably, Monkey himself is another kind of father figure to Gwyn. He is certainly of the same generation as Norman, having known him at Cambridge. He also takes a direct (though intermittent) involvement in the bringing-up of Gwyn. Through this means the father figure is again seen to be ultimately un-knowable, forcing Gwyn to ask all manner of questions about who he is, without arriving at definite conclusions.

Having paid for the release of Dic, Monkey takes him to Emma's house, where Nesta and Gwyn can pick him up. This is where Gwyn meets Monkey Pitter for the first time. Yet it is also strangely not like the first time, for these two have been co-present in each other's lives for decades. Monkey tells Gwyn:

'When I said that I have known you all your life I was not joking. Your life, I mean, has been there all the time as a central, an essential, fact. But what I have further to say is what you do not yet know: that you have been deprived of your history.'
'I don't agree. My mother was very honest about it.'
'About herself, of course, and as far as she knew. But let me put it in this way. You have been deprived not only of your natural father but of what he was doing and has done.'
'I don't understand. '
'That's just what I'm saying. But I would like you to believe that it has been heroic in its way.'[12]

There is a direct parallel between history, society and the father figure. History and society are kinds of father. Yet they cannot be simply opposed symbolically to the personal-natural father who eludes symbolisation. For as Monkey tells Gwyn, it is in losing his natural father that he also loses access to his own history as social father. Thus the personal father is already one kind of social father. The symbolic father and the personal father are thus different functions, co-present in each of these different figures of the father: Norman Braose, Bert Lewis, Monkey Pitter.

Gwyn Lewis cannot understand what Monkey Pitter tells him because final understanding is not possible. Gwyn wants to know who his father is, and hence gain access to his own history and identity, which would in turn enable him to work out where his loyalties lie. Yet the structure of the novel frustrates this hope, and again provides not answers, but questions.

The unsettling nature of these (non)-revelations sends Gwyn to his mother, Nesta, and a further search for answers. When he asks her about his father, her response is to show him two paintings she has kept secret for years: a portrait of Norman from the time of their affair back in the 1930s, and a picture of Bert horrifically scarred during the war.

These provide some of the answers Gwyn needs about his own identity, but he still does not understand them. He says the portrait of Bert is beautiful – because of the love Nesta put into painting it. But she rebukes him: it is not beautiful. Bert was a cripple, made unbeautiful by the world of war:

'I said that the painting is intensely beautiful, it is -'
Nesta screamed suddenly. He stared at her, bewildered. She pushed him hard away. He staggered slightly as he went back. Nesta screamed again.
'Mam,' he said, 'Mam, what is it?'

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[12] Williams, *Loyalties*, (London: Hogarth, 1989), pp.242-43. Cited hereafter as *L*.

> She was staring at him, angrily. He was bewildered because he had never seen her in even ordinary anger. She had always been so contained and quiet and pleasant, always younger than her age, self-possessed and slightly withdrawn.
> '*It is not beautiful!*' she screamed, in a terrible high voice.
> 'Mam, please, I didn't mean that,' Gwyn struggled to say.
> 'Do you understand nothing?' she screamed. 'Do you know nothing? Have you learned nothing?' (*L*, pp.347-48).

The paintings are supposed to provide answers. 'Who is your father? Look, and see.' But when Gwyn looks, he sees not one father, but two. An answer is again deferred. *Loyalties* in this sense can be grouped with a series of more recent, postmodern, novels about paintings, such as Michael Frayn's *Headlong* and Peter Ackroyd's *Chatterton*, where the paintings in question refuse to reveal any ultimate truth.[13]

The canvas of a painting is a suggestive metaphor here. It is a blank space which appears to be filled up by the act of painting, so that when the portrait is complete the image is finalised, and fixed for posterity. With these paintings, however, the paintings are radically incomplete, existing in an ongoing dialogue with each other and opening a space out of which meaning can pour. In this perspective, Julia Kristeva believes painting to be an inherently dialogic form, like language itself.[14] The canvas expresses, as it were, a *full blankness*. It expresses not too little meaning for Gwyn to understand, but too much. If there was only one painting, he could arrive at an answer. It is because of the dialogue between the paintings that he cannot do this. The form that appears to offer conclusions fails to do so. It can only open up further questions.

Raymond Williams found this structure appropriate to a turbulent period – the Cold War - in which it was continually necessary to define one's own political commitments by measuring them against an externally changing political history. At the conclusion of *Loyalties* it is strongly suggested that Norman – and even Monkey Pitter – have travestied the socialist ideals of their youth by agreeing to work for a capitalist government. Where Gwyn's loyalty lies then remains an open question. Williams's own socialist commitment to putting deep questions to the capitalist order is replicated by the form of his novels, which undertake similar work. *Border*

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[13] Linda Hutcheon discusses Ackroyd's novel in her *Politics of Postmodernism*, (London: Routledge, 2002), pp.91-93.
[14] See for example Kristeva's analysis of the paintings of Giotto and Bellini, in her *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), pp.214-69, especially p.228 and p.242.

Country, The Volunteers, The Fight for Manod and *Loyalties* all generate a series of questions and problems which cannot be conjured away.

Cultural Materialism: The Welsh Example

Williams's novels, like the emergent drama of Scandinavia, Ireland and Wales, resist absolute closure. This brings his work into constellation with the earlier generation of Welsh industrial writers, who shared Williams's political commitments. It could be argued that Williams's television play, *Public Inquiry*, makes the conjunction between emergent drama and critical realist fiction even more overt. In that play, Williams dramatises the aftermath of a railway accident. By using the convention of the industrial disaster, Williams explicitly aligns himself both with the emergent drama which he valued so highly, and with the conventions of Welsh industrial writing which I identified above.[15] Yet it is not clear at which point in his career Williams read the Welsh industrial novels, so that the alignment is not one of straightforward influence or homage. What then is the precise relationship between Williams and those earlier writers?

In January 2006, the Welsh Assembly Government launched the *Library of Wales* book series. This initiative can be seen as a process of cultural reclamation: twentieth-century Welsh writing quickly becomes unfashionable and out of print. The ostensible goal of the *Library of Wales* is to make some of the writing produced in Wales over the last century available again. The first five titles included Raymond Williams's novel, *Border Country* and a much earlier pair of working-class novels from south Wales, Lewis Jones's *Cwmardy* and *We Live*.

The *Library of Wales* gives us a chance to rediscover or re-evaluate the tradition of Welsh industrial fiction that flowered in the 1930s – a tradition to which Williams as novelist consciously belonged. This rediscovery has only been possible because since 1997, Wales has had some self-rule and hence the capacity to develop such projects, in a way that it did not earlier.

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[15] One of the few commentaries on Williams's drama is Bernard Sharrat, 'In Whose Voice? The Drama of Raymond Williams' in *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives* ed. Terry Eagleton, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), pp.130-49.

On the other hand, it is also in a real sense true that Wales only has self-rule partly because writers like Williams spent time and effort exploring and asserting their identity and culture. This resulted in an increase in the cultural confidence of a notoriously unconfident Wales. The drift can be seen by comparing the two referenda, of 1979 and 1997. In 1979 the Welsh electorate overwhelmingly rejected the principle of self-rule. The narrow margin by which Wales then embraced devolution eighteen years later represented a 'huge shift.'[16]

Clearly the real claim for the power of literature is a modest one: the two referenda are not only caused by the reading of novels, and in fact owe a greater debt to more direct political campaigning. Yet the demarcation between the overtly political and the cultural spheres is not so clearly drawn, if we get rid of the idea of literature as an idealist realm, and explore its material properties. This is particularly clear in the case of Williams, who was for a time member of the Welsh political party, Plaid Cymru.[17] He was a political activist within Wales on one hand, Welsh novelist on the other, while all the time refusing to draw such a strict line between the two spheres.

The argument I am making is a historical one: the growth of cultural self-confidence in the peripheral nations of Britain gives rise to the conditions in which it becomes possible to work for political self-determination. At the same time, this is also made possible in part by the growth of cultural expression – including novels – which are similarly self-determined in the sense that they are not necessarily concerned with reproducing the themes, forms or styles of literary London. Williams declares these twin elements of his work for Welsh consciousness when he says:

> The central point about Scottish and Welsh nationalism is perhaps this: that in Scotland and Wales we are beginning to find ways of expressing two kinds of impulse that are in fact very widely experienced throughout British society. First, we are trying to declare an identity, to discover in fact what we really have in common, in a world which is full of false identities... And second, but related to this, we are trying to discover political processes by which people really can govern themselves – that is, to determine the use of their own energies and resources – as distinct from being governed by an increasingly centralised, increasingly remote and also increasingly penetrating system: the system that those who run it, for their own interests, have decided to call 'Unity.' (*WSW*, p.188).

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[16] See Tom Nairn, *After Britain,* (London: Granta, 2001), p.82.
[17] Williams only left Plaid Cymru in the 1970s because he found it difficult to 'discharge his obligations living at a distance from Wales' (*WSW*, p.206).

Williams wants to reveal what socialists 'really have in common' in a world which is 'full of false identities.' If this is applied to Wales, the implication would be that some versions of Welshness are 'more Welsh' than others. This in turn would be to overlook the constructed and mediated nature of *all* national identities. By contrasting official narratives of British identity ('false identities') with 'what we really have in common', Williams seems to affirm a notion of authenticity which might not survive rigorous theoretical critique. The implication of his words here seems to be that if we could strip away the official narratives of the modern state, we would arrive at a version of the nation that somehow exists prior to the means by which it is constructed.

This notion of authenticity overlooks the constructed nature of all identities and might be disabling. This is particularly relevant to Williams, to whom the process of representation creates the possibility to construct alternative forms. The process of discovering an identity which he refers to is in part the work of fiction and cultural production. The demand for politically separatist institutions then belongs to the more strictly political sphere. Yet Williams does not draw such a tight demarcation between the two. Instead, he makes an argument about the relation of culture and politics that is openly dialectical and mutually determining.

Separatist political institutions create the conditions under which it becomes possible for Scotland and Wales to support their own cultural production: their own writers, dramatists and artists. At the same time, it is also partly because those cultural figures have the courage and confidence to explore their own identity with differential regard to the British whole that the nations in question develop the self-confidence required to demand political institutions of representation. Rather than being side-tracked by a notion of authenticity, this emphasis on how writing has the capacity to generate alternative formations implies that all identities are constructed and mediated. This is particularly important to Williams, who was concerned to generate just such alternative forms. When he is writing about the inter-relation between writing and social change, therefore, he is on much surer ground than when making vague references to 'true' and 'false' versions of national identity. The materialist emphasis on the kinds of formation that can be constructed by writing overcomes the total separation of politics from culture. In a way therefore, Raymond Williams *was* campaigning for Welsh devolution while sitting at his desk writing novels. These participated in the general rise in Welsh consciousness during the period 1979-97.

In retrospect, it is possible to argue that even the overwhelming 'no' of 1979 was not the huge defeat that it is usually described as. Compared to the situation in the 1930s, to have organized a vote at all represented a significant step forward for Wales. The cultural confidence necessary to ask for things like political institutions of representation increases in part because of the work of cultural production in allowing an exploration of Welsh identity. This had begun with the formation of the Welsh industrial novel, and with the general changes in Welsh society of which that formation was a part.

In the Introduction to this thesis, I drew attention to Williams's concept of the interplay between *dominant, residual* and *emergent* cultural forms. The Welsh industrial novel formation can be described as the *pre-emergent* stage in the development of Welsh critical thought. The *pre-emergent* is a category Williams used to refer to those areas of oppositional cultural or political work, which initially appear in such minor and dormant form as to be virtually invisible within the dominant culture. It was developed in *Marxism and Literature*:

> What matters, finally, in understanding emergent culture, as distinct from both the dominant and the residual, is that it is never only a matter of immediate practice; indeed, depends crucially on finding new forms or adaptations of form. Again and again what we have to observe is in effect a *pre-emergence*, active and pressing but not yet fully articulated, rather than the evident emergence which could be more confidently named. (*ML*, 126-7).

The *pre-emergent* is valuable because it is the stage at which the first tiny movements for change begin to become active inside a society. As a result, it may well be that the *pre-emergent* forms by which a society is gradually changed can only be identified as such retrospectively. We might say that the desire in certain small quarters of British society to abolish the monarchy could be defined as *pre-emergent*.[18] Yet we will only really be able to say this retrospectively in the future, from the standpoint of a moment at which abolition has been achieved.

This retrospective mapping is certainly the case with the Welsh industrial novels, and the general militancy that was felt in the Welsh valleys during the 1930s. The point could be made with regard to those Welsh industrial novels such as

[18] This is an important element of Tom Nairn's work. In *After Britain* Nairn notes that 'intimations of United Kingdom mortality' include the end of empire, self-rule in Scotland and Wales, and 'stirrings of republicanism.' See p.42.

Cwmardy, where a new monarch is crowned and where most of the crowd fervently celebrate, with just one or two figures questioning the need for Welsh people to honour an alien monarchy. The emergence of the Welsh industrial novel formation from the 1930s onwards demonstrates that oppositional forces to the unitary British state in general, and to the alien capitalist order in particular, were already beginning to develop. This is why I consider them a *pre-emergent* formation.

The political commitment to socialism and unionism in which those novels played a part opened up a broader commitment to extending the nature of British democracy. This would become manifest in 1997 with the achievement of provisional self-rule in Wales. The period between referendum defeat in 1979 and eventual success in 1997 is then the 'emergent' period. It was during this period that Welsh self-confidence grew at a sufficient pace for real change to become manifest in 1997.

Yet in the 1930s, it could not have been clear that devolution as such was the natural endpoint of this kind of activism. Thus it is only retrospectively that the industrial novel formation can be identified as *pre-emergent*. It is because of this near invisibility that Raymond Williams felt that pre-emergent forms were the most important oppositional forms in a society. This is because they are so latent as to be precarious in the extreme.

Williams's *Marxism and Literature* can help us map the terrain of Welsh consciousness in this way. Even more interesting is the contemporary genesis of another well-known Williams article, 'The Tenses of Imagination.' This was published in the collection, *Writing in Society*, in 1984. It had originally been delivered as a series of papers at the University College in Aberystwyth in 1978 – the year before the referendum.

'The Tenses of Imagination' has become one of Williams's better-known passages of cultural theory.[19] It is frequently invoked, primarily because it offers a series of generally applicable insights into a materialist theory of culture. What is less often noted, however, is the precise cultural history in which the paper was an intervention. The general applicability of the theory has tended to occlude the moment of production. In other words, the precise past, present and future which Williams was trying to imagine when he delivered the paper in Aberystwyth in 1978 were *Welsh* pasts, presents and futures. It is not only the case that the paper can be used to

[19] This is noted by Dai Smith in 'Relating to Wales' p.47 and n.41.

understand the political activity that was occurring contemporaneously with it. That political and historical moment itself provides the key context in which we have to understand the development of the paper. The Welsh identity of Raymond Williams is then a crucial element to our understanding of cultural materialism. Not only does that analytic theory enable us to understand Welsh history; Welsh history itself helps us to understand the genesis of the theory. This underlines the dialectical way in which forms of writing relate to social processes.

Williams opened 'The Tenses of Imagination' by considering various different definitions of the concept of *imaginative* works. He notes that the term is usually used to refer to acts of creativity or original composition, with the strong implication that the works in question have been imagined up without regard to any external social or historical reality.

Doubting that it is really possible for any kind of imaginative process to function in this way, he goes on to consider a related second definition of *imagination*, that of empathy. This kind of imaginative process in effect asks us to put ourselves in a certain situation. It says 'imagine if...,' and then extrapolates a certain situation with which first writer and then reader seeks to cultivate an imaginative affinity. Williams rejects this definition of *imagination*, again because he suspects that it is simply not possible for imagination to function without regard to a prior set of images or system of knowledge in the mind. These images and this knowledge can of course only have been produced socially through a process of experience. Williams rejects definitions of *imagination* which present the mind as having no existing relation with these processes. Such definitions are guilty of the kind of psychic idealism I explored in Chapter One.

In moving away from idealist versions of *imagination,* Williams introduces two important new elements of imaginative work. Firstly, he attempts to examine the relationship between the imagination and the 'real.'[20] Secondly, he suggests that imagination is not simply a matter of dreaming up new kinds of image, as if from nowhere. On the contrary, the imagination is then a process of demonstrating connections between what can be thought and what already exists.

Accordingly, the imagination becomes important as it bears on helping us realise the kind of *future* that might be achieved. No socialist change could occur

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[20] Williams, 'The Tenses of Imagination' in *Writing in Society,* pp.260-61. Cited hereafter as 'Tenses.'

without a prior concept of the possibility of change, and an accompanying sense of what new kind of society might be built by change. Imagination plays a tangible part in helping desirable futures become a reality. The imagination is thus 'real' in this active sense of enabling potential futures to be brought forward. It is also 'real' in the important sense that the desired futures must always be shown in advance to be achievable. That is why imagining the future is not in Williams's account a matter of psychic idealism, but rather, of demonstrating how a desired future might be rooted in a contemporary present, and is hence a possible destination arising out of it. Imagination is then not a break with contemporary reality, but a continuation of it.

'The Tenses of Imagination' was based on material delivered in Wales in 1978. At this point, Williams had one very particular desirable future in mind. That is, the possible future of a Welsh society in which some kind of democratic home rule would become a reality. I suggested above that the concept of *pre-emergence* was developed out of Williams's experience of Welsh history. We can sense this by reading 'The Tenses of Imagination' while remembering that Williams was campaigning for Welsh self-rule at the time of writing the paper.[21] Reading in this way enables us to reconstruct the precise occasion on which the paper was delivered. Williams writes:

> The mental concept of something not present to the senses, which corresponds to future-writing and to many kinds of fantasy, coexists in the language with the sense of empathy, of feeling our way into a situation which in a general way we know but which we can come to know as it were from the inside – a sense which I think is not far from the idea of discovering and being moved by a structure of feeling within what is already nominally and even carefully known. ('Tenses,' p.267).

Having outlined above the extent to which the Welsh experience was formative in the development of cultural materialism, it is impossible to read this passage, delivered in Wales less than a year before the 1979 referendum, without casting an eye over that contemporary political process. The idea of gradually being moved by a structure of feeling which is nominally known appears in this light to be another take on the *pre-emergent*. The campaign for Welsh democracy was already moving through Williams

[21] The most important article Williams wrote on this topic was 'Variations on a Welsh Theme' in *The Listener*, 94, 1975, pp.429-30.

at this point, and this had started with the pre-emergent phase – in the depression of the 1930s.

As examples of the kinds of past and future fiction he has in mind, Williams mentions his own trilogy: *Border Country, Second Generation* and *The Fight for Manod.* Williams emphasises that this trilogy is structured in such a way as to relate knowable pasts and contemporary presents to a distinctly possible and realisable – as opposed to an utterly imagined – future. Moreover, he states explicitly that the climax of *Border Country* is 'the sequence during the general strike of 1926' ('Tenses,' p.262). The object of relating a possible future to a knowable present and a nominally known past is to show retrospectively that that past can be seen as the pre-emergent period of present and future processes. When Williams declares that the 1926 section is the climax of the whole trilogy, he brings himself into this deliberate constellation with the Welsh industrial novelists whom I have referred to as *pre-emergent* and whose work was also based at least in part on that historical experience.

The past, in other words, matters inasmuch as it can be shown to have a living connection with the present. This is also true of the future. Forms of future fiction are important inasmuch they can help us develop a sense of what kind of desirable future might be fashioned out of the historical present. The challenge presented to the novelist of historical fiction is not only one of discovering what Williams calls the 'base' facts of the historical period in question ('Tenses,' p.262). It is also a matter of demonstrating their relation to contemporary social processes. Williams describes the research he had carried out in writing his own trilogy in the following way:

> much of the time it is as if prolonged thinking about what I have called the base... is not imagination in that inventive sense at all, though of course one is literally inventing. It feels, rather, like some kind of contact. ('Tenses,' p.262).

Williams argues that the process of composing fiction is a matter of demonstrating living connections between past, present and future: 'Either past or present in their ordinary and reasonable temporal senses, seems to have to go through this other process before, as we say, people begin to move and speak.' ('Tenses,' p.265). The historical imagination is not a retreat from knowable history; it is an accentuation of it.

Benedict Anderson has drawn attention to the temporal irony whereby newly emerging nations tend to 'imagine themselves antique.'[22] The process by which new nations imagine themselves into existence involves a complex interplay between memory and forgetting. The new nation elaborates upon its own official narratives of history to legitimise the claim to historic nationhood. At the same time, this is dependent on a process of forgetting other, recent histories which might involve the emergent nation with the history of a rival or neighbour state. Anderson concludes:

> Awareness of being imbedded in secular, serial time, with all its implications of continuity, yet of 'forgetting' the experience of this continuity.... engenders the need for a narrative of identity.[23]

The temporal contradictions which inhere in the concept of nationhood give rise to this need for a narrative of identity. This is what we find happening in Raymond Williams's novels. Thus, when discussing his own novels, not only does Williams relate the structure of his Welsh trilogy to the past, present and future of modern Wales, he also emphasises that the future projection is the most important element in both cases: 'I have now twice – in *The Fight for Manod* and in *The Volunteers* – set novels ahead of their time of writing: in one case as a plan, in the other case – deliberately and discontinuously – as an action.' ('Tenses,' p.266).

In these two futuristic novels, Williams uses a pair of contrasting novelistic conventions. *The Fight for Manod* projects a particular future for a depressed industrial community by exploring the frustrations of that community's contemporary aspirations. In *The Volunteers,* Williams chose not to root the imagined future in a recognisable present. He used what he called 'a degree of cut-off from the present' ('Tenses,' p.266), in order to create a cautionary tale about the dangers involved in giving in to political pessimism when seriously considering the future. The autocratic future imaged in *The Volunteers* is not a future that Williams wanted us to arrive in.

This caution against pessimism is the conclusion Williams offers in 'The Tenses of Imagination.' He urges his audience to maintain a sense of how contemporary society really could be changed, and how a potential future really can

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[22] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, xiv.
[23] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p.205.

be identified within the present. Against the current of authoritarianism and political pessimism, Williams says:

> there are other deeper forces at work, which perhaps only imagination, in its full process, can touch and reach and recognise and embody. If we see this, we usually still hesitate between tenses: between knowing in new ways the structures of feeling that have directed and now hold us, and finding in new ways the shape of an alternative, a future, that can be genuinely imagined and hopefully lived. ('Tenses,' p.268).

It is hard not to understand this hope for the future as the specific hope for some kind of Welsh democracy.

When devolution was realised in the referendum of 1997, the large swing that had been required to overturn the defeat of 1979 was in part due to the raising of Welsh confidence that comes about through an exploration of Welsh culture and identity in writing, in film, and in other cultural forms.[24] Williams himself had been involved in this work, so that although he did not survive to witness the moment of devolution, in some senses, his lifetime *was* that moment. Thus it is perhaps no coincidence that at roughly the moment of devolution, the *Library of Wales* has brought Williams's own novel, *Border Country*, back into print. Williams, that is to say, *is* still present during the process of devolution – in his writing, which was a contribution to it.

The relationship that exists between cultural production and social processes is a dialectical one. This can be gauged by examining the complex historical sequence in which these cultural emergences have occurred. On the face of it, it seems as though *The Library of Wales* (2006) was launched *after* political change had occurred (in 1997). This would suggest that cultural production is passively dependent on anterior political change, which it then reflects in a secondary manner.

On the other hand, not only had a relative step towards devolution already been taken much earlier on, with the holding of a referendum in 1979, but some of the literature itself had also been published at an earlier period, in the 1930s. The question as to which came first, the *Library* or the *Assembly*, is then a very much more complex one than it may first have appeared.

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[24] Some of the Welsh literature, music and film from the period is discussed by Jane Aaron and Wynn Thomas in 'Pulling You Through Changes: Welsh Writing in English Before, Between and After Two Referenda' in *Welsh Writing in English* ed. M. Wynn Thomas, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp.278-309.

The Welsh case is then a particularly clear example of a more general materialist theory of culture. On the one hand, it has become possible to revalue Welsh writing of the 1930s (and since) because the assembly exists to finance such projects. On the other hand, the fact that the assembly itself exists is in part due to things like the writing. Cultural forms do not only reflect society. They play an active part in societal processes. Literature is both cause and effect of political change. Political change is both cause and effect of the kind of writing produced.

Chapter Three: Universities - Hard and Soft

At the same time as the tradition of Welsh industrial writing, Raymond Williams was also involved in a quite different tradition - of *university writing*. This is generally English and middle-class. Such involvement in different traditions is significant, because it shows Williams always crossing disciplinary, generic and national boundaries.

Concepts of education were of direct and central relevance to what Williams called the *long revolution* towards a participatory democracy. In this chapter, I want to examine Williams's concerns with education from his socialist political perspective. I shall do this by considering Williams's revolutionary proposals in education in relation to the theories of adult literacy put forward by Brazilian Marxist educationalist Paulo Freire.[1]

Secondly I shall examine the implications this radical perspective has for Williams's fiction. I wish to argue that his novels can be considered as university fiction – in a particular way. Williams's theoretical interest was always in finding ways of transforming the dominant social order. Accordingly, he gives the classic *campus novel* formula a twist - using his fiction to imagine a different kind of university from those which he found in more conventional campus novels.

I shall contrast Williams's fiction with the campus novels produced by the so-called 'Movement' group of writers. This was predominantly an informally associated group, rather than a formal association of writers. The 'Movement' is generally defined as that group of poets included in the 1956 Macmillan anthology, *New Lines*: Philip Larkin, Thom Gunn, Donald Davie, Elizabeth Jennings, Robert Conquest, D.J. Enright, John Holloway, Kingsley Amis and John Wain. Having for the most part met each other while students at Oxford, by the 1950s and 60s these writers were part of the literary establishment. Although the 'Movement' is generally considered a group of poets, it is interesting that a number of the writers also wrote fiction. I shall be particularly concerned with the campus novels of Kingsley Amis and John Wain.

Williams, Freire, Amis and Wain were all born within a few months of each other in 1921-22, and all wrote about universities. The contrast between the earnest

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[1] The similarities between the two men are indicated by R. Radhakrishnan in his 'Cultural Theory and the Politics of Location' in *Views Beyond the Border Country* ed. Dennis L. Dworkin and Leslie G. Roman, (Routledge: London, 1993), p.285.

radical theoretical work of Williams and Freire on one hand, and the trivialising approach of Amis and Wain on the other, could hardly be deeper. Examining the work of the different writers together will enable me to convey a diversity of political attitudes to education and democracy. This in turn conveys a sense of the oppositional stance Williams adopted towards the dominant culture of his day. In examining Williams's work alongside that of Freire, I am also implicitly beginning to outline an argument for understanding Williams himself as a postcolonial theorist, which I shall develop further in Chapter Four.

University, Nation and Empire

The texts in which Williams expounded his most rigorous theoretical critique of the capitalist social order were *The Country and The City* (1973) and *Marxism and Literature* (1977). In these studies, Williams takes two different approaches. *The Country and The City* shows Williams examining the history of nation-building. His approach was a dialectical one, showing that the nation-state was created in response to the spread of an early capitalist order, while at the same time contributing to the creation of that order. I shall explore this in more detail in Chapter Four. *Marxism and Literature* by contrast is less about nations *per se,* and more directly focused on the political and social order of advanced capitalism. This implicitly – and at times explicitly – is transnational in scope, so that the version of social order expounded in *The Country and The City*, which is identified with nation-building, is extended in *Marxism and Literature* in a way that departs from this national focus.

I wish to argue here that Raymond Williams's interest in the system of university education followed a comparable trajectory from *nation* to *transnational capitalism*. In Britain, universities arose historically as institutions capable of generating a sense of unified national culture during what Tom Nairn has described as the period of nationalism across Europe: the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[2] As Bill Readings succinctly puts it in his study, *The University in Ruins*, the nineteenth-century university 'gives the people an idea of the nation-state to live up

[2] Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain*, pp.93-105.

to, and the nation-state a people capable of living up to that idea.'[3] National culture was disseminated around the nation both via informal networks of personal relationship within the political class and via formal means of communication, most notably the print media. This enables us to glimpse again the importance of Benedict Anderson's argument, that the history of those media *is* the history of the nation-state.

It is interesting to recall in this context that English was taught in universities in Scotland before it was taught in England.[4] There are complex historical reasons for this, but undoubtedly one of those reasons was that the distinctiveness of an already-defined Scottish culture posed a significant threat to the putative unity of Britain's national culture during the national period. Teaching English literature within Scottish universities was one way of extending this unity.

Not only was English taught as a degree subject in Scotland before it was taught in England. It is also true that it was taught in colleges in India before it was taught in either Scotland or England. In *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*, Gauri Viswanathan notes that by entering a commitment to 'undertake the education of the native subjects' in India, Britain's imperial government accepted 'a responsibility which it did not officially bear even towards its own people.'[5] Benedict Anderson points out that Parliament mandated to the East India Company the 'allocation of 100,000 rupees a year for the promotion of native education' as early as 1813.[6]

In this early period of the empire, colleges in the colonies were used to carry out ideological work. Anderson draws attention to Macaulay's notorious minute on Indian Education (1835), which hoped that the teaching of English literature could produce a class of peoples 'Indian in blood and colour, but English in opinion, in taste, in morals and in intellect.'[7] The cultural mission of the colleges around the empire was thus specifically to augment the bonds of the empire in an informal, hegemonic, manner. As Viswanathan puts it, 'raising Indians to the intellectual level of their Western counterparts constituted a necessary prerequisite to... forestalling the

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[3] Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), p.65.
[4] I gained this information from Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature*, (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2000).
[5] Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), p.23.
[6] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p.90.
[7] Quoted in Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p.91.

danger of having unfortified minds falsely seduced by the "impurities" of the traditional literature of the East.'[8]

At a later period, when the empire itself was faced with a faltering history, it needed to resort to more direct means of control and administration. In *Masks of Conquest,* Viswanathan explores the various measures that were brought into the Indian education system as a result. Entrance to the Indian Civil Service became predicated upon success in competitive public examination, in contradistinction to the *ad hoc* basis on which appointments had previously been made – primarily on the basis of personal acquaintance within the political class. Provision for the education of Indian subjects was organized along state lines from 1854, and proposals for a network of university colleges in Madras, Bombay and Calcutta were forwarded in 1857.[9] All of these measures represented a professionalisation of Britain's entire approach to education and empire during the second half of the nineteenth century.

The business of colonial colleges was no longer to perform the cultural and ideological work of empire. Rather, colleges were now required to produce a number of highly trained functionaries to carry out the administrative, legal and communicative work of the empire. Viswanathan notes that 'with the extended use of English as the language of commerce was brought into existence a much larger class of Indians willing to co-operate with the British in the exploitation of India's resources.'[10] She suggests that education in India became progressively more utilitarian, with a large working class being educated solely in the 'mechanical arts and skills of agriculture' along with the skills required to meet specific regional needs such as 'land measurement and land registration.' Meanwhile, the new network of national university colleges fostered 'a small but influential intellectual' group, which was 'drawn largely from the indigenous learned class' and 'was targeted for eventual induction into government service.'[11]

Education, in other words, acquired a new utilitarian aspect at the same time as it sloughed off its cultural and ideological prerogatives: it was 'pursued as a means to an end.'[12] A new generation of educated Indians was garnered to provide the empire with the lawyers, civil servants, administrators and even doctors, on whom its

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[8] Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest*, p.6.
[9] Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest*, p.153; p.113.
[10] Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest*, p.147.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest*, p.113.

continued survival would depend. Chinua Achebe has drawn attention to a similar need for the university colleges to produce a steady output of highly trained professionals in the latter stages of colonial rule in Africa.[13]

There is thus a shift from conceptions of the university within the colonial context. The initial emphasis on cultural and ideological work was replaced by a nascent ethic of professionalism where students were prepared to carry out specific tasks in the system. This transition from *cultural* university to *professional* training would only subsequently take place inside Britain itself. This underlines the extent to which the colonies played a leading constitutive role in the historical development of British culture.

The important implication I wish to take from this is that, since education was imbued with an imperial and ideological ethic which was subsequently to decline, educational institutions now occupy a vacuum. The university arose in order to create and distil a sense of harmonious national identity that could then be disseminated in the colonies. In a period where the colonial imperative no longer obtains, the historic mission of the university must clearly be modified. Bill Readings has referred to the university as being in this sense a 'post-historic' institution, having lived on long after its historical *raison d'etre* has become obsolescent.[14] In the light of this obsolescence, the structural function of the university system has changed, from performing general cultural and ideological work, to fulfilling a professional ethos where specific people are trained to perform specific functions.

Cambridge English

Raymond Williams explored the relationship between universities, literary study, national culture and the imperial formation on one specific occasion. 'Cambridge English, Past and Present' was delivered as one of Williams's retirement lectures in 1983, and was subsequently included in the volume, *Writing in Society.*

'Cambridge English, Past and Present' begins with a preliminary survey of the history of English as a university subject. Notably, Cambridge was one of the last British universities to introduce a degree course in English. The stimulus towards

[13] See Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (London: Heinemann, 1975), p.72.
[14] Readings, *The University in Ruins*, p.19.

introduction had been much greater and much more successful in 'newer' universities. Moreover, Williams draws attention to two important formations outside the university that were crucial in bringing about the establishment of the new discipline: the new adult workers' education movement, and the contemporary movement for the education of women.

Williams points out that one of the major obstacles to the establishment of English as a Cambridge degree subject was that it was seen as 'the women's subject' and lacked 'sufficient rigour' for a course at Cambridge.[15] Terry Eagleton has pointed out that when English finally broke through as a Cambridge subject, it did so on the basis of having demonstrated a rigorous, 'masculine,' demanding syllabus.[16] Throughout the late nineteenth century, the dissemination of a certain sense of national identity had been accompanied by a corresponding sense of masculinity. This perception of strength and heroism had enabled the British imperial formation to allot to itself the role of guardian of societies the world over.

The establishment of English as a Cambridge subject was predicated on the overcoming of effeminate perception. This could be done partly by outlining a rigorous syllabus of examination. Such work could only go so far, however. A more general solution was to underline the utility, within the masculine-imperial formation, of mobilising that subject to augment the formation itself. In 'Cambridge English, Past and Present,' this is what Raymond Williams suggests eventually happened:

> The interests that came to be defined as aesthetic and cultural, or earlier as spiritual and historical, turned readily to so much available and valuable work. It was indeed these interests which produced the new nineteenth-century sense of Literature, as a body of imaginative writing which represented these most general human qualities. Behind that again was the late eighteenth-century sense of *English* Literature, a *national* literature, as distinct from the earlier classical and European emphases. English studies in the schools, in the nineteenth century, included the history and geography as well as the literature and the language of this self-conscious and consciously taught *nation*. ('Cambridge English,' p.179).

If literary study was required to demonstrate its own worth, the capacity of literature to provide the conscious teaching of a national formation was the surest ground on which it could carry out such a demonstration. During the national and imperial period, literary study became accepted precisely because it enabled the nation to be imagined into being. It was through the institutions of education in general, and

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[15] 'Cambridge English, Past and Present' in *Writing in Society*, p.180. Cited hereafter as 'Cambridge English.'
[16] See Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), pp.28-30.

through literary study in particular, that the nation could be consciously taught into existence. Concepts of *literature* were inextricable from ideas of *nationhood.* In the related essay 'Crisis in English Studies,' Williams draws attention to this:

> The idea of a 'national literature' is a historical production of great importance for a certain period. The term *Nationalliteratur* began in Germany in the 1780s, and the histories of 'national literatures', with quite new perspectives and emphases from older and more general ideas of 'humane letters', were being written in German, French and English from the same period, in which there was a major change of both ideas of 'the nation' and of 'cultural nationality.' ('Crisis in English Studies,' *WS*, p.195).

To teach literature was to teach the nation. Two important points emerge from this. Firstly, Williams emphasises that this kind of teaching of national identity through recourse to a literary tradition can only be a partial and selective process. The selection of literature for study thus had certain bearings on what kind of nation was being imagined. This in turn opens the whole practice up to a notion of *intention.* Who is doing the teaching and for whom? I shall argue in Chapter Four that Williams supplements Anderson's notion of *imagined communities* with an idea of *who* was doing the imagining. He was in no doubt that this kind of teaching was brought about as an extension of ruling-class policy during the national and imperial period. The history of education in the nineteenth century thus has a very particular relation to the history of the nation and of the empire. As Tom Nairn puts it, 'the progress of schools and universities measures that of nationalism, just as schools and especially universities become its most conspicuous champions.'[17]

In 'Cambridge English, Past and Present,' Williams highlights the propensity of early literary study to eliminate Celtic otherness from the canon of literature, and hence from definition within the national culture:

> What was being traced, of course, was a genuine ancestry of thought and form, with the linguistic connections assumed from the habits of the private schools. It is not so much this cultural *connection* that counts; it is the long gap, in the culture, history and languages of these islands, across which this persuasive formulation simply jumped. 'We should know the poets of our own land', but then not Taliesin or Dafydd ap Gwilym. 'Of our own people', but then not the author of *Beowulf.* ('Cambridge English,' p.181).

This selective tradition in literature was extended by structural congruence into a selective version of national identity itself. The ostensible justification for this

[17] Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain*, p.100.

was linguistic coherence: the tradition as selected comprised a body of works in the *English* language. The corollary of this was that the alternative traditions in Celtic writing, and hence in Celtic self-definition and nationhood, were written out of the record. The conflation of *literature* with *English* in effect bolstered the homogeneous sense of English nationhood that had been much more broadly propagated since the nineteenth century, when, as Eric Hobsbawm points out, England's national traditions were actively invented.[18]

If the slippage from *Literature* to *English* was a means of effacing the threat presented by Celtic otherness to British national unity, it also brought up another challenge for the national formation. Already by the end of the nineteenth century there was a substantial body of works in English produced from within nations other than Britain. Were these then to be considered a part of the 'English' tradition? If so, this would contradict the historic role of the university: to create a sense of unity within national culture. Williams draws attention to the question in 'Crisis in English Studies':

> Not just Literature, but English Literature. This is itself historically a late construction, since for medieval writing, at least to the seventeenth century, it is obviously uncertain. Is 'English' then the language or the country? If it is the language, there are also fifteen centuries of native writing in other languages: Latin, Welsh, Irish, Old English, Norman French. If it is not the language but the country, is that only 'England' or is it now also Ireland, Wales, Scotland, North America, Old and New 'Commonwealths'? ('Crisis in English Studies,' *WS*, p.194).

The historic emergence of English as a university subject interacts with the history of Britain as an imperial power in a dynamic of mutual transformation. The extent of its empire brought Britain to a global pre-eminence that was mirrored in the ongoing prevalence of the English language around the world. English had spread relatively rapidly in the nineteenth century precisely because of the use of English education in the colonial colleges to serve a hegemonic purpose. Language had seemed to be a perfect instrument of empire.

The trouble with teaching English to colonial subjects was that they had a tendency to use it. As a result, there arose a powerful and interesting literature demonstrably in English yet from societies and nations other than Britain. This was at odds with the ostensible purpose of teaching English as a university subject. At home,

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[18] Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp.1-14.

that teaching had been carried out to propagate a sense of nationhood. In the colonies, the aim was to augment the cultural bonds of empire. Yet the teaching of English in the colonies had resulted in the rise of another kind of literature, and hence the possible imagining-into-existence of other kinds of nation. In other words, the means that enabled the nation to be consciously taught through its literature also enabled other nations to be written into the record.

In the end, the university of imperial culture was unable to carry out the hegemonic work for which it had been created. The place of English within that university opened up other kinds of literature and hence other kinds of nation to self-definition, at the same time that it was supposed to assert the unity of British culture. The empire was undermined by the means that appeared to assert its existence. What Viswanathan calls the 'failure of English' came hand in hand with the failure of empire.[19] This again underlines the dialectical relation that exists between kinds of writing and historical processes. The empire failed partly because its hegemonic institutions failed. Those institutions failed because the empire, more broadly speaking, had entered a period of transition.

These changes were beginning to take place during the early years of Raymond Williams's career. As empire began to decline, conceptions of the university would undergo historic variation, shifting from the organ of hegemonic and ideological work, to the provider of a specific set of skills to shore up Britain's faltering global role. The transition from a university of historic nationhood to the university of corporate professionalism within a transnational economy can be seen by examining the ideas of a university that were prevalent in Williams's own time.

Banking Education

The shift from university of cultural nationalism to college of technical or professional training was happening in Britain during the early part of Raymond Williams's career. This was partly related to a relative economic decline brought on by the period of decolonisation. It was also related to a general economic downturn following the war. Rather than generating a sense of cultural nationalism – as at an

[19] Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest*, p.142.

earlier period – the specific aim of universities and colleges was now to equip the country with a sector of trained professionals who would enable British businesses and other institutions to survive and expand in a market economy that was in the process of going global. As Bill Readings puts it, the multicultural nature of modern universities serves modern capitalism by 'redirecting corporate loyalty towards the corporate logo rather than the national flag of any one country.'[20]

Williams was concerned with education as a carrier of asymmetry which prepares its students for participation in the competitive sphere. In a system that asserts the incontrovertible right of a competitive free market ethic, education can be used in conjunction with social and political structures which promote the primacy of the individual over all social concerns. This kind of education promotes certain students and keeps certain others back, thus exactly mirroring and underlining the competitive world into which it is assumed the students will enter once their education is complete.

The dominant view of education in Williams's day was one where students were instilled with the spirit of competitive individualism at every point, thus actively generating a social order founded on these assumptions. This dominant approach to education is an entirely instrumental one, as if its students simply go to a certain place of instruction for a certain amount of time and emerge from that institution once the period of instruction has expired, fired up to face the world of competition.

Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire calls this a 'banking' concept of education, depositing in students only so much knowledge or so many skills as are necessary to perform certain tasks. Freire defines banking education as follows:

> Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the "banking" concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. [21]

Freire's banking model sees education as a short-term transfer of specifically deposited units of information or skills, which will equip students to perform specific tasks within a society. Freire uses the term to draw attention to the relative shift from

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[20] Readings, *The University in Ruins*, p.45.
[21] Freire, *The Paulo Freire Reader*, ed. Ana Maria Araújo Freire, trans. Donaldo Macedo, (New York: Continuum, 2000), pp.67-68.

education as a *process* of cultural hegemony to education as an *instrument* of international capitalism.

This occurs at two inter-related levels. There is the manifest *content* of an educational programme. This is inseparable from the cultural and institutional *carrier* in which that content is conveyed. Banking education instils in its students the skills necessary to fulfil a particular role within the capitalist order. At the same time, the competitive system of examination by which that education is assessed also instils simultaneous assent to the world of competition. 'Verbalistic lessons, reading requirements, the methods for evaluating "knowledge", the distance between the teacher and the taught, the criteria for promotion: everything in this ready-to-wear approach serves to obviate thinking,' writes Paulo Freire.[22] The system of banking education occupies a specific place within the capitalist social order. It prepares its students to perform certain tasks within that order by equipping them with specific skills. At the same time, it nurtures them into a general acceptance of that order through the gradual exposure to a system of hierarchical relations where individual progress is measured by competition. The manifest content of banking education is thus mirrored in latent form by the institutional carrier of that education. The world of competition to which students are exposed in education is precisely the world they will encounter outside it. Banking education, in other words, promotes the virtues of free market competition. As a result it systematically fails – often despite the commitments and efforts of individual teachers - to communicate anything beyond these concerns. Williams says:

> The failure is due to an arrogant preoccupation with transmission, which rests on the assumption that the common answers have been found and need only be applied. But people will (damn them, do you say?) learn only by experience, and this, normally, is uneven and slow. A governing body, in its impatience, will often be able to enforce, by any of a number of kinds of pressure, an apparent conformity. (*CS,* p.302).

The meaning of 'conformity' within the history of the education system is historically variable. During the imperial period, the institutions existed to carry out the dissemination of a strongly unified sense of national culture. This is the legislated unity that Williams thought was the specific goal of early literary study. Following the

[22] *The Paulo Freire Reader,* p.71.

end of the colonial project, as we have seen, the new social order that emerged was one of globalising capitalism. Conformity within this order is now understood in a more flexible way, as a kind of *assent* for the world of free market competition. Williams would refer to this kind of flexible assent, following Gramsci, as cultural and political *hegemony* (*PMC*, p.37).

Williams's ideas of 'assent' and 'conformity' describe the phenomenon whereby the transfer of education on a top-down model instils in its recipients a kind of assent to the fundamental structuring of competitive society. Williams was opposed to this instrumental concept of a university, and sought ways to replace it with the kind of institution that might be used to promote a kind of thinking more sceptical of the capitalist order. As Fazal Rizvi says, it is not only that Williams wanted to use education to democratise society. Williams also showed that 'education itself has to be democratised.'[23]

Problem-Posing Education

Paulo Freire opposes the banking concept of education with a *problem-posing education*, where dialogical relations are indispensable. Problem-posing education disavows the idea that educational authorities can limit in advance what knowledge and skills are to be transferred to the students. It disavows, in Raymond Williams's words, the idea that the correct answers about how to structure education have been found, and need only be applied.

This alternative kind of education can only function when the hierarchical separation of teachers and students is dissolved and each is willing and able to enter into dialogue with the other. The teacher ceases to be a figure of distant authority, and will become instead a promoter of critical social and cultural thinking. Freire says:

> Those truly committed to liberation must reject the banking concept in its entirety; adopting instead a concept of men and women as conscious beings, and consciousness as consciousness intent upon the world. They must abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world.[24]

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[23] See Rizvi, 'Williams on Democracy and the Governance of Education' in *Views Beyond the Border Country: Raymond Williams and Cultural Politics* ed. Dennis Dworkin, (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp.146-47.

[24] *The Paulo Freire Reader*, p.74.

Freire's problem-posing education points towards a dialogic approach. He advocates the ongoing asking of questions between teacher and student, as a means of dissolving the hierarchical relationship between the two. Freire expounded this idea in his study, *Learning to Question*. His approach to education mirrors the plot devices I explored in Raymond Williams's fiction in Chapter Two. In his novels, Williams uses the investigation or thriller plot to open up complicated questions of identity, history, and loyalty. In his approach to education too, Williams comes down on the side of open-ended questions.

The most significant proposal Williams makes for education is to teach discussion. This models education on an idea of exploration and mutual interchange of ideas. This is in sharp contrast to banking education, which is a tool of the competitive capitalist order that relies on the all-knowing teacher handing whatever knowledge or skills are deemed appropriate on to the passive and dependent students. A discussion-orientated education will remain constantly open and flexible, able to modify its curriculum as the needs, interests and abilities of the students vary. The kind of education system Williams envisages runs something like this:

> [C]hanging the educational system from its dominant pattern of sorting people, from so early an age, into 'educated' people and others, or in other words, transmitters and receivers, to a view of the interlocking processes of determining meanings and values as involving contribution and reception by everyone. (*RH,* p.36).

Williams's terms *transmitters* and *receivers* recall the deposit boxes of Freire's banking education. Freire's career-defining book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* has direct relevance to Williams's interest in the long revolution towards an educated participatory democracy. To both writers, the important theme is education as a site for resistance to cultural domination. This was the case in the context of the late colonial societies in which Freire worked, in Africa, and continued to be the case, in a different context, in the world of developed capitalism from which Williams worked.

In the Introduction, I examined Williams's idea of the *dominant, residual* and *emergent* cultural forms. I showed that the contest between these strands of social and cultural life is never simply and decisively won, but involves the constant making and unmaking of ideas. This is what Williams calls hegemony: the putting into circulation

of ideas, and the gradual build-up of assent to them through their construction and recognition as norms. The kind of hegemony being created has undergone historic variation, from unified national culture, to general assent to the capitalist structure. As a result, Williams modifies Gramsci's notion of hegemony, and points out that there are several *hegemonies* in the plural:

> We have to emphasize that hegemony is not singular; indeed that its own internal structures are highly complex and have continually to be renewed, recreated and defended; and by the same token, that they can continually be challenged and in certain respects modified. That is why instead of simply speaking of 'the hegemony', 'a hegemony', I would propose a model which allows for this kind of variation and contradiction, its sets of alternatives and its processes of change. (*PMC,* p.38).

The notion of different kinds of hegemony underlines the historic variation in how social orders are constructed. The early emphasis on social order as a self-contained nation-state evolved historically into a social order of transnational capitalism. Universities played specific and different parts in the material construction of the social order in each period.

The multiplicity of hegemonies also enables us to realise that no dominant system can entirely resist different modes of opposition to it. In the earlier period, literary study in India could not ultimately prevent an alternative critical consciousness from developing, even though the ostensible goal of such study was to downplay this oppositional thinking. Raymond Williams believed that in the later period too, political hegemony is not able to exhaust all of the forms of opposition to it. If the university is understood as a tool of the competitive capitalist social order, then there remains the possibility of transforming this into the site for the promotion of critical thinking. The challenge then is to find a kind of university where this is possible.

Hard and Soft Universities

What form could such a university take? A clue is provided by Williams's novel *The Volunteers*. The Volunteers of the title are a covert group of revolutionary activists. They have realised that in an age of technologically enhanced surveillance of the social organism, mere surface raging or unsustainable lashing out at the individual

offices of power will not enable revolution. Their strategy is to infiltrate the organs of state power – parties, committees, anywhere where decisions are taken - and work to achieve change from the inside.

Rosa, an insider of this covert group, explains to the investigative journalist Lewis Redfern how this infiltration works. Aside from what she calls the 'hard' parts – the strikes, the marches, the visible campaigning, she also says:

> 'There are soft parts. The universities, the schools, the operative parts of the media.'[25]

This distinction between the hard and the soft can be used to inform my distinction between different kinds of education. The Volunteers imagine all universities as 'soft' components of the social order – in contrast to the 'hard' elements of the military-industrial complex. French Marxist Louis Althusser makes a similar distinction between what he calls the 'Repressive State Apparatus' and the 'Ideological State Apparatus,' where the former correspond to the 'hard' elements of a social order, and the latter to the 'soft.'[26]

It was precisely to show that aspects of the ideological apparatus such as the media, publishing houses, and universities carry out a material role in generating a social order that Raymond Williams developed his cultural materialism. This theory overcomes the distinction between 'material' and 'ideological' components of a social order, by showing that all the components are materially active.

I will therefore modify the vocabulary employed by Rosa in *The Volunteers*. All universities occupy a material part of the social order and are therefore not to be seen as 'soft' or idealist elements of that order. On the other hand, universities have the capacity either to support the social and political order dogmatically, or to operate as a site for the promotion of critical cultural and political thought. I shall therefore use the terms *hard* and *soft*, to refer to these contrasting conceptions of a university.

A *hard* university practices a programme of banking education and contributes to the continual reproduction of the dominant cultural order through mobilisation of a competitive ethic and selective promotion. Its courses last for a fixed (and pre-determined) period of time, after which the process of education is assumed to be

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[25] Williams, *The Volunteers*,(London: Hogarth, 1985), p.130. Cited hereafter as *V*.
[26] Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* trans. Ben Brewster, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), p.145.

complete. Its syllabus is also pre-selected and barring the occasional choice of course varies little according to the needs or ideas of the individual student.

This is not how Williams imagined a university. I shall therefore refer to Williams's concept of the university as a 'soft' university. A soft university is not restricted to one location, like a hard university. On the contrary, if it is really to be democratised, then what happens in the university must have an active relation with all the rest of the society. Williams's valuation of the Open University, which he thought was the most important legacy of Britain's Labour government of the 1960s, is an example of a soft university.[27]

Tony Pinkney describes the planned city of Manod in Williams's novel, *The Fight for Manod*, as a 'soft' city. Pinkney makes this point in order to draw attention to the conflicts that Williams portrays in the novel over how the city will be built, and for whose benefit.[28] This is precisely the point I wish to draw out of the discussion of different kinds of university. It shows that rather than simply acquiescing in the construction of a capitalist order, the whole role of universities within society is still actively contested.

A 'hard' university offers students courses which run for a prescribed period of time, after which their education is deemed to be complete and the educational process is terminated, without regard to the progress or achievement of the students. A 'soft' university by contrast would not determine in advance how long it will take students to reach an acceptable level of educational fullness. Instead, a 'soft' university enables students to continue learning at the same time that they engage in important creative and critical work. Again, the Open University can be seen as an example of this.

Moreover, whereas a 'hard' university selects the content of its programme in advance, giving its students little or no input into that selection, a 'soft' university equips students with the resources to decide for themselves what educational programme has most direct and immediate relevance to their own lives. An example of this in Williams's writing would be his praise for the Centre for Contemporary

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[27] See for example *PM*, pp.156-57; or *T2000*, p.151.
[28] See Pinkney, *Raymond Williams*, (Bridgend: Seren, 1991), p.89.

Cultural Studies at Birmingham University, which drew its materials from different aspects of contemporary British culture and continually updated its syllabus.[29]

I have drawn attention to the shift from university of national-imperial consciousness to the notion of university as professional training for entry into the world of free market capitalism. Raymond Williams was aware that no form of cultural dominance can ever entirely exhaust the modes of opposition to it. This enabled him to make continual proposals about how to reform and revolutionise education. *The Long Revolution* (1961), *Communications* (1966), and *Resources of Hope* (1988) all contain specific proposals for how to transform the kind of education that is provided. This in turn would enable education to elude the dictates of the capitalist order by teaching its students scepticism towards that order. Historically, the establishment of this kind of oppositional university was not realised in full, even in the Open University. The task was then a matter of trying to demonstrate, against certain political and economic pressures, the possibility of creating such a system. That possibility was best demonstrated by Williams in his fiction.

Williams Versus the 'Movement'

I wish to consider Williams's Welsh trilogy as university fiction, in contrast to the more conventional campus novels of Kingsley Amis and John Wain. This comparative analysis will enable me to demonstrate the radical new departure Williams gives to the genre of university fiction and hence demonstrate his deeply-rooted ideas of education, and its imbrication in cultural and political life.

Williams normally considered the established canon. As Fred Inglis points out, the writers he discusses are normally already safely dead and cannot speak back.[30] The 'Movement' writers are an important exception to this. He comments on their work – and they on his – with unusual frequency. Williams's books *The Long Revolution, Orwell, Raymond Williams on Television,* and *What I Came to Say* all contain passing swipes at the dominant fictional form of the 1950s and 60s, which

[29] Anthony Easthope provides a specimen syllabus from the Birmingham Centre's course on popular culture in his *Literary into Cultural Studies*, (London: Routledge, 1991), pp.182-87.
[30] See Inglis, *Raymond Williams*, p.188.

Williams called 'personal-pleading' (*LR,* p.310).[31] Taken together, these small asides add up to a more consistent critique of those writers. This implicit critique can then be read back into the fiction Williams produced in contradistinction to the 'Movement' writers, to glean a more general sense of radical incommensurability.

For example, in an article published in *New Statesman* in 1961, to which he and Raymond Williams both contributed, Kingsley Amis described as 'Leftist fallacies' the notion that 'the competitive element could, or should, be taken out of education.'[32] I have already examined Williams's opposition to the competitive system as a cultural dominant in education. The system of assessment and advancement is selective and competitive from a very early stage. To Amis this is necessarily so, since it is the essential way of preparing students to slough off the merely educational stage and enter the real (competitive) world. Education within the spirit of aggressive competitive individualism is thus to Amis 'an essential step towards doing something for ourselves.'[33]

In his response to Amis in the *New Statesman* article, Williams puts his own argument for breaking 'the deadlock between the abstract *individual* and *society.*'[34] He strongly resists the idea that the assimilation of all spheres of society to the competitive world of capitalism is either necessary or desirable. In his pursuit of a democratic future he suggests that there should 'be no assimilation, but transformation.'[35] That is, where Amis sees the individual working to obtain the maximum of self-determination within the panoply of society, Williams wants to re-think relations between human beings and society. The difference in conception of education between the two men stems from this. Amis believes in an education system with an element of selection through competition built in. Williams seeks ways to remove the hierarchical element from education. Amis's university is a place to which by definition few people have access and which denies any association with the outside world. Williams's university, by contrast, is commensurate with a degree of universality.

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[31] Further references to the 'Movement' writers can be found in *Orwell,* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1971), p.87, cited hereafter as *O; Raymond Williams on Television,* (London: Routledge, 1989), p.104; and *WCS,* p.25.
[32] Amis, 'Definitions of Culture,' *New Statesman* 2 June 1961, p.880.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Williams, 'Definitions of Culture,' *New Statesman* 2 June 1961, p.882.
[35] Ibid.

The difference is visible in the fictional portrayal of the university mobilised by each writer. Kingsley Amis's first novel, *Lucky Jim* (1954), is the kind of campus novel that portrays a 'hard' university. Junior lecturer Jim Dixon is plagued by a student, Michie, who wants to know what special subject Dixon is offering, so that he can decide whether to subscribe to it. But Dixon, we are told, wants to keep Michie out. The reason is that 'Michie knew a lot, or seemed to, which was bad' because Dixon himself 'wouldn't be able to go on seeming to know' the answers 'while Michie was there, questioning, discussing and arguing about them.'[36]

The central premise of a 'hard' university is this: The lecturer is there to *know,* and to impart this knowledge uninterrupted by the irritating questions of the students. It is not so much that Amis endorses this view of a university. On the contrary, *Lucky Jim* satirises that whole conception of how the hierarchies of academia are structured: 'No firsts this year for us,' explains Dixon's colleague Beesley, 'four thirds, and forty-five per cent of the first-year people failed. That's the only way to deal with 'em.'[37] In this mocking of the groves of academe, Amis is unable to break beyond the bounds of comic writing. He is unable to make any serious suggestion as to how else a university should be organized. Despite lampooning what I have described as a 'hard' university, Amis has no corresponding sense of a 'soft' university, and his satire is rendered powerless as a result.

A 'hard' university requires its students to leave home forever, while the 'soft' university is all about the interpenetration of work and education. When Jim Dixon gives his public lecture at the end of *Lucky Jim*, he remarks that the audience 'seemed to contain everybody he knew or had ever known apart from his parents.'[38] Matthew Price by contrast does not leave his family behind in *Border Country*. He tells his father, 'I can't just be a delegate, sent out to do a particular job. I've moved into my own life and that's taken me away. I can't just come back, as if the change was water. I can't come here and pretend I'm Will Price, with nothing altered.' (*BC,* p.297). Yet come back he does. This is the fundamental difference from a 'hard' campus novel. There, education simply equips individuals to do specific jobs, and takes them away from their homes forever. This is the case in John Wain's first novel, *Hurry on Down*

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[36] Amis, *Lucky Jim,* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), pp.28-9.
[37] Amis, *Lucky Jim,* p.169.
[38] Amis, *Lucky Jim,* p.213.

(1953) and Amis's later *The Old Devils* (1986). In *Border Country*, education and work are both dialectical processes, they take place everywhere.

Border Country is an autobiographical novel. Williams used it as a kind of vehicle for the exploration of his own experiences. The relationship between the distant university and the local community is shown to throw up a series of challenges, because the necessity to exist in a series of different environments renders Matthew Price, like Williams himself, perpetually homeless. He is not quite at home in the new university world he has entered. Neither can he simplistically return to his prior way of life as if nothing had changed.

Williams expressed this elsewhere as the conflict of ideas between educated thought and customary feeling, or again, between an attachment to place and a new experience of mobility. The first novelist whom Williams suggests registered the experience of this conflict in English was Thomas Hardy. Williams's evaluation of Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* could be taken as a commentary on *Border Country* itself. Williams draws attention to the continuity of experience in the kinds of writing from *Jude* to *Border Country*:

> It is more than a matter of picking up terms and tones. It is what happens to us, really to us, as we try to mediate those contrasted worlds: as we stand with Jude, but a Jude who has been let in; or as we go back to our own places, our own families, and know what is meant, in idea and in feeling, by the return of the native. The Hardy country is of course Wessex: that is to say mainly Dorset and its neighbouring counties. But the real Hardy country, I feel more and more, is that border country so many of us have been living in: between custom and education, between work and ideas, between love of place and an experience of change. This is of special importance to a generation, who have gone to the university from ordinary families and have to discover, through a life, what that experience means. [39]

The anguished dilemmas experienced by Jude outside the towers of Christminster were repeated almost a century later in the anguish felt by Matthew Price in *Border Country*. Williams's moving description of Hardy's life and work thus has a particular resonance in the context of university education in Britain in the 1950s and 60s.

There is a further element of kinship between *Jude the Obscure* and *Border Country*. Christminster in Hardy's novel is not simply a university; it is a church school. When the young Will in *Border Country* goes to the Reverend Pugh to discuss

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[39] See Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*, (London: Hogarth, 1984), pp.98-99. Cited hereafter as *EN*.

the idea of going away to university, Pugh expresses fear that he is not the best person to advise. He is 'isolated' from the village, 'sad and indifferent' (*BC,* p.213). He cannot relate to most of the villagers who are chapel-goers, rather than members of his Anglican church. His retreat from the daily life of the village into his own private study seems to parallel the studies and combination rooms of classic campus novels. Pugh draws an explicit comparison between his church and education: 'Formerly, you know, Matthew, I should have been educating you, and then sending you on, later, to the cathedral' (*BC,* p.213). Yet if his church somehow corresponds to a university, it can only be to a 'hard' university. He tells Will that he is just a kind of 'outpost' with 'no roots' in Glynmawr (*BC,* p.214), whereas the roots of a 'soft' university snake out and reach everywhere.

Pugh wonders if there is really any difference between the greatest cathedral, or university, and the chapels and schoolrooms of Glynmawr. 'Perhaps they are only the Glynmawr chapels better built. Only as institutions, sometimes, they seem more.' (*BC,* p.216). There is a difference between the great cathedrals and universities and Glynmawr's chapels and schoolrooms. It is the difference between a 'hard' and 'soft' university, or between an education which connects, and an education which divides. *Border Country* shows Williams beginning to question the inherited divisive dominant mode of education without imagining what he could replace it with. For that, he would have to try his hand again, in *Second Generation.*

Oxbridge, Their Oxbridge

Lucky Jim's college is situated on 'College Road.' In other words, it is entirely self-enclosed. Williams's barely disguised Oxford of *Second Generation* shows his protagonists living on 'Between Towns Road.' Interaction between university and world is always already inevitable.

Amis too wrote an Oxford novel, *The Alteration,* (1976), comparison of which with *Second Generation* is instructive. *The Alteration* imagines an England in which the Protestant Reformation – and much subsequent social reform – never took place. It must appear simultaneously as both a backward unregenerate past, and the contemporary world of 1976. Amis achieves this by marrying every conceivable relic of Merrie England (shires, and lords, and markets, and taverns, and ale) with such

features of modern life as trains and cars. The effect is of a culture caught up in a parody of itself, slowly suffocating.

The plot runs thus: talented choirboy Hubert Anvil is discovered by his Abbott, who wishes to castrate him so that he can sing as a choirboy forever and so bring glory to the Abbey school. The Pope gets word of all of this from his envoys Viaventosa and Mirabilis, and wants to bring Hubert to sing in Rome. Hubert runs away, is kidnapped by lowlife vagabonds, and escapes to the New England Embassy where the American Ambassador Cornelius Van Den Haag smuggles him out of the country and enables him to avoid the 'alteration' that is to be inflicted upon him.

At the same time the 'alteration' that is imagined to come over England, the Protestant Reformation, is avoided by the Papacy. But by this very logic, which invites us to imagine *if* things were different, we are compelled to accept that such a reformation has already benefited our own world. It is a gesture of ratification and evasion. The choirboys talk about a scientific novel they are reading, which imagines the 'ridiculous' scenario of a modern, post-reformation England, free of tyrannical rule.[40] This invites us as readers to celebrate the fact that we really do live in such freedom.

In the 1976 of Amis's novel, women are not free to speak in public.[41] Officers of the oligarchic state have unfettered power of interrogation derived from distant Papal authority.[42] The coercive apparatus of the tyrannical state employs torture and sexual exploitation to harness control over people.[43] At the same time, the state authorities stir up disease and war, as ways to reduce the size of the troublesome population.[44]

This is the world before the Protestant Reformation and before the extension of democracy, brought right into 1976. Amis's characters can only imagine the democratic post-reformation future which we as readers must presume ourselves to inhabit. The implication is that we as readers are living at the end of history. That is, they belong in a historical past which has now been forgotten, as if all problems and cruelties have now been solved and as if history itself has reached its destination. It is a historical deflection that forestalls in advance the possibility of questioning the

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[40] Kingsley Amis, *The Alteration,* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976), p.28; p.136
[41] *The Alteration*, p.55.
[42] *The Alteration*, p.130.
[43] *The Alteration*, p.162.
[44] *The Alteration*, p.200 and p.206.

social ordering of our own present. Anything that might need questioning has already been questioned.

In reality, history is an ongoing process. Raymond Williams's emphasis on different kinds of hegemony shows us that a social and political order has always to be actively generated. It is never simply a given. Amis's novel seems to imply that since all the facets of medieval absolutism which he portrays had ended by the twentieth century, then the social order which arose in its place was natural and spontaneous, rather than actively generated. Yet the social order of free market capitalism is not a given. It is not the way the world looks when it is simply stripped of the trappings of a prior historical period. It is in itself an actively generated social order. It is perhaps no coincidence that *The Alteration* concludes with Cornelius Van Den Haag's plan to ship Hubert over to New England. The endpoint of progress away from the medieval absolutist state is that haven of free market competitive individualism – America.

Raymond Williams took issue explicitly with this. In the *New Statesman* article, he warned - *contra* Amis - of seeing 'the United States as a kind of universal future' which can be seen as 'a process of modernisation' but in reality is a much more ideological gesture towards the capitalist order.[45] Williams's Oxford novel *Second Generation* posits a quite different culmination to the process of education.

Peter Owen is a research student on Welsh population movements in a thinly disguised Oxford, to which his parents Kate and Harold, and Aunt and Uncle Myra and Gwyn, had earlier moved to seek employment at the car factory. American Academic Professor Kissler has heard about Peter's research and proposes to ship him over to California to carry out further work in population studies. Yet Peter ends up deciding to concentrate his efforts on the 'real' work of relating to his own community, and writes to Kissler to decline.[46] America as universal future, and metonym for the capitalist competitive society, is explicitly rejected. University education is not envisaged as an instrument to enable participation in the capitalist sphere.

Second Generation is Williams's attempt at what I am calling a 'soft' university novel. Williams wishes to disavow the notion of education as an autonomous sphere. This is done by portraying the work of the university directly

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[45] Williams, 'Definitions of Culture,' p.882.
[46] Williams, *Second Generation*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964), p.253. Cited hereafter as *SG*.

alongside that of the factory where Peter's father and uncle work. Events in one locale shape and inform events in the other. When Peter's supervisor Robert Lane asserts an absolute distinction between the two spheres, Peter shouts it down: 'No Robert. This is not two cities but one.' (*SG,* p.251). Against this, Lane launches a counter-offensive, pointing out that the two communities do not mix with each other at all. 'But,' Lane continues, 'I can rage against the feel of the university and yet still respect the work that it's doing.' Peter retorts, 'Because you've sold out to it, surely. You daren't make the connection.... The questions you learn not to ask. The questions I was taught not to ask.' (*SG,* p.251).

The concern throughout *Second Generation* is with the questions that a certain kind of education specifically teaches its students not to ask. *Lucky Jim* satirises the university system without being able to imagine an alternative kind of education. Raymond Williams appears to have thought this was generally true of the university novels of the 'Movement' writers.[47] 'Haven't you determined/ the answer with your question?' he rhetorically asks them in his only published poem, written on the occasion of 'First Looking into *New Lines*' (*WCS,* p.257). *New Lines* itself was a 'Movement' anthology, and the doggerel Williams wrote in response to it was an implicit swipe at the values expressed by that formation of writers. In particular, Williams was suspicious of the tactical disinterestedness that the poems seemed to be expressing. As he told *Poetry Wales* in 1977, what he objected to was the vitiation of literature as a social process which he thought was being practiced by the 'Movement' writers. Literature in this practice is hollowed out and deadened, replaced by 'quite attractive verse of its kind, light social verse – a sort of shrug, polite, carefully not going beyond the emotions of what was probable' and therefore also ruling out 'emotional intensity and the kind of writing that goes with it.' (*WSW,* p.88).

In contrast to this tactical disavowal of self-interest, it is necessary to recall Paulo Freire's concept of education, as learning to question. This was also the way in which Raymond Williams envisaged a dialogical practice within the classroom. The point must be understood as a continuing conflict over the definition and role of the university, which is then also a conflict over the construction of the capitalist order.

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[47] This also is Alan Sinfield's view of the 'Movement'. See his *Literature, Politics and Culture in Post-War Britain,* (London: Athlone Press, 1997), p.184.

The Competitive Ethic

Williams's fictional approach to the university shows him taking exception to a whole tradition in English writing. The 'Movement' novelists by contrast are the custodians of that tradition. Indeed, Edward Lobb says of the 'Movement' that it 'has an importance out of proportion to the quality of the work' precisely because it 'crystallized tendencies which were already at work' and 'set the tone' for British writing 'for several years.'[48] Although Lobb is talking about the dominant tone in British poetry, his comment could apply equally to the production of novels, for the number of 'Movement' writers who attempt what I have called 'hard' campus novels is striking. Other examples would be Philip Larkin's *Jill* (1946) and D.J. Enright's *Academic Year* (1955). These novels imagine the university as an instrument of the capitalist order and are inculcated with a kind of competitive ethic. This in turn had arisen out of the nascent shift in conceptions of the university, from disseminator of national culture, to organization of rigid professionalism.

Though there are specific historic variations in the role of the university, there is also an important continuity. In both periods, the university employed what Pierre Bourdieu has called a 'salvationist logic.'[49] It was the business of the university of national-imperial culture to save unchristian societies from damnation by making them see the light of western reason. During the transition away from empire, the salvationist logic was directed not at the colonies, but at the metropolis itself. It is now the business of the university to provide the relevant professional training to enable British institutions – and above all British business – to survive in the post-imperial world of global capitalism. The professionalised university of transnational capitalism was thus envisaged as the institution that would save Britain from the decline of its imperial culture, by enabling businesses to succeed in the world of free market competition.

The transition from *cultural* to *professional* university had already occurred by the time Raymond Williams's career was underway. This can be seen by examining the commitment to corporate professionalism and to the competitive market that we see in the 'Movement' novels. J.P. Kenyon has noted the congruence between

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[48] See Lobb, 'The Dead Father: Notes on Literary Influence' in *Studies in the Humanities,* 13 (2), 1986, pp.67-80.

[49] Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Culture and Society* trans. Richard Nice, (London: Sage, 1977), pp.111-14.

university fiction and professional corporate novels: 'if you substitute for "professor" the term "managing director", or for "College Council" or "Faculty Board" the term "Board of Directors", you realise that many university novels are in fact "business-like", in a literal sense.'[50] Universities it seems are only too literally part of the competitive corporate establishment.

John Wain's 1958 novel, *The Contenders,* is a good example of the business-university novel. It tells the story of three friends, Joe Shaw, Robert Lamb and Ned Roper, who have all recently left education and find themselves deliberating which professional field to enter. Robert and Ned are the contenders of the title. They have always been rivals - academically, emotionally, in sport and now professionally. Their constant one-up-man-ship culminates in Ned Roper stealing Robert Lamb's wife, Myra. The novel's narrator, Joe, appears to eschew this competitive ethic. In the opening paragraph of the novel he tells us:

> This is the story of two men, Robert Lamb and Ned Roper. I know them both and I'm going to tell the story as I watched it happen...[51]

In the figure of Joe the narrator, Wain appears to admonish the competitive ethic that has converted human relationships into the mere raw material of success. Joe, the reasonable narrator, sets out to tell things simply as they happened, as if he has no interest in the events being narrated. Yet Wain's narrator is simultaneously inside and outside the game. For Joe – uncompetitive Joe - is nevertheless assured of promotion in his own industry, journalism.

D.A. Miller has drawn attention to a similar competitive spirit in a much earlier novel, Anthony Trollope's *Barchester Towers* (1857). There, different church factions compete with each other for control of the Barsetshire religious community. Miller thinks that the structure of *Barchester Towers* functions as a kind of social policing, shoring up the cultural dominant of late Victorian England. The battle is undertaken without any prospect of one side or the other finally coming out on top: there is no foreseeable victory. This continually deferred compromise has the effect of binding the two competing factions to each other, and of excluding the laity. Miller concludes that 'what matters most in this game is not whether you win or lose, or how

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[50] J.P. Kenyon, 'The Business of University Novels' in *Encounter,* June 1980, pp. 81-84.
[51] Wain, *The Contenders,* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), p.7.

well you play it, but that you play at all.'[52] For in keeping the competition going, the hierarchical social structure supported by it is most effectively kept in place. Troubling questions cannot be asked because there is simply no platform from which to raise them. The competition for control of the religious community in the novel thus has the latent effect of 'valorizing the social order that the religion serves.'[53]

The blank satire of academia that we find in *Lucky Jim* works in this way. It is also the effect of Wain's reasonable narrator in *The Contenders*. It is no coincidence that Wain chose to insert onto the title page of his novel an epigram taken from Anthony Trollope: 'success is the necessary misfortune of human life.'[54] This is worth remarking upon for two reasons. Firstly, we are made aware that Wain is consciously writing in the tradition handed down from Trollope. Wain's narrator, like Trollope's, tactically disavows material advancement in order to ensure his own.

Secondly, Trollope himself was the one single writer in the whole of English literature of whom Raymond Williams was most trenchantly damning. From *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* in 1970, up to the career-reviewing *Politics and Letters* (1979), and beyond to the late critical assessments of *Writing in Society* in 1984, Williams never ceased to think Trollope was so out of touch with the majority of human beings as to render his novels meaningless.[55] In the life and work of Trollope, a travelling civil servant who worked for Her Majesty's Post Office in a number of colonies, the tie-in between education, empire and the establishment is most visible.

All of this has significant implications for the 'hard' and 'soft' concepts of a university. I have already pointed out the explicit parallel drawn by Raymond Williams in *Border Country* between closed institutions of the church and similarly closed institutions of education. Miller notes that Trollope's church was divorced from any religion, just as in the later Pallister novels, Trollope portrayed a Parliament

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[52] D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police,* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), p.115.
[53] Miller, *The Novel and the Police,* p.118.
[54] Quoted in Wain, *The Contenders,* title page (p.6).
[55] In *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (1970), Williams writes that Trollope employed 'a minimum both of analysis and of individual disturbance' (*EN*, p.84). Similarly, in *Politics and Letters* Williams says that Trollope 'had no difficulty in reproducing the known forms'(*PL*, p.264), while in *Writing in Society* he says that Trollope 'could write so simply that he hardly seems to be writing at all' (*WS*, p.107). Anyone familiar with Williams's work will immediately notice the ambiguous nature of these comments.

without any active engaging politics. Miller ironically describes this as the emptying of life of 'unseemly' political activity.[56]

What Miller ironically terms 'unseemly' is portrayed by Wain as unreasonable, lacking in decency. Unreasonable is Robert, railing against the establishment into which he yearns for admittance, and then drowning his grievance in alcohol and becoming obnoxious. Or to put it another way round, unreasonableness also is Ned Roper asking Robert with studied inhuman politeness to run along from the house where he (Ned) has set up home with his (Robert's) ex-wife, and stop making a spectacle. Between these extremes of obnoxious or studied inhuman unreasonableness, the middle ground occupied by reasonable narrator Joe Shaw appears the firmest ground. Anything can be described as long as nothing is really communicated as a process. Nothing can be discussed in a serious engaged manner because that would lead on to the fanaticism of Robert or else the studious inhumanity of Ned.

The reasonable narrator Joe is a level-headed, friendly, approachable figure. Talk about serious matters of the day he will not, so that near conclusion of *The Contenders*, even home rule for Scotland becomes a mere nicety, something to talk about in a queue for the telephone with a stranger:

> When I got to the box there were a couple of chaps standing quite contentedly outside it... One of them was a Scotsman, and he was able to add variety and breadth to our little symposium by giving the characteristic north British view. I began to question him keenly about the nationalist movement, and the extent to which he, personally, considered Home Rule desirable or feasible. Now and again we glanced at the woman inside the box; she didn't seem to be talking much – if she was, we could only conclude that she had learnt some technique of talking without moving her mouth; from a ventriloquist, no doubt. This led our discussion naturally into the realms of entertainment and the arts, our Caledonian friend contributing a spirited defence of the traditional songs and dances of his native heath. [57]

The patronising tone of this passage towards Scottish culture hardly needs pointing out. The Scot, we are told, is 'spirited' and this implicitly contrasts with the calm and decorous demeanour of the mere questioner. We are not told what either party really thought about home rule. Such conclusions do not matter in situations like these. It does not matter what is discussed as long as they are discussed reasonably, without seeking to generate any social effect. Throughout *The Contenders*, the real

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[56] Miller, *The Novel and the* Police, p.116, p.118.
[57] Wain, *The Contenders,* p.263.

business of communication is forestalled so that nothing is allowed to fracture the competitive world this novel inhabits.

I began this chapter by exploring the historic rise of the university as an organ of national culture. English as a university subject had been taught in Scottish universities before it was accepted in institutions in England. I suggested that this enabled the nineteenth-century university to carry out some of the cultural and ideological work of nationalism – and ultimately, of empire. The dissemination of an undifferentiated British culture through the teaching of subjects such as English, history and geography in the Scottish universities was one way in which the putative unity of the British state could be augmented. This in effect is what Amis and Wain do to Scotland and Wales. Wain's Scotland is swallowed up by the putative entity, 'north Britain.' Similar representations of Wales can be found in Wain's *A Winter in the Hills* (1970) and Amis's *The Old Devils* (1986).

A Winter in the Hills and *The Old Devils* are both university novels. In *A Winter in the Hills*, London philologist Roger Furnivall heads to north Wales to study Celtic languages, believing this will equip him to gain admittance to the institute for Celtic study in Uppsala, Sweden, where he dreams of being surrounded by attractive women. In north Wales, Furnivall gets drawn into local gangster conflicts and a series of romantic escapades, before returning to London and his academic career. In other words, *A Winter in the Hills* satirises the work of the university professor, yet without making any serious exploration of its role in a democratic society.

Amis's late novel, *The Old Devils*, describes the lives of four retired couples in the south Wales area where, years earlier, they had attended university. Their relationships are complicated by the arrival of another former acquaintance, the poet and literary professor Alun Weaver, who has made a name for himself in England as *the* poet of Wales. Yet where in Hardy's *Return of the Native* or Williams's *Border Country* we find a serious commitment to exploring the effect of living continually in different kinds of community, *The Old Devils* does not perform this work. In satirising the nationalist pretence of the 'poet of Wales,' it carries out similar work to *Lucky Jim*. That is, it holds the world of academia up to biting satire, but without being able to suggest alternative forms of relationship, so that in the end, the satire itself becomes blank and meaningless.

The derisive representations of Scotland and Wales that occur in 'Movement' fiction may be traceable to the shifting national and imperial fortunes experienced by

the British state during this period. In the face of the dissolution of empire and relative decline in Britain's fortunes, the last preserve of national culture was to cling to the spurious unity of a multi-national state formation. This was in a period when the pressure for self-government was slowly beginning to rise in Scotland and Wales.

Thus in the work of Britain's established novelists of the late imperial period we can discern an appeal to the putative unity of the British state. This really belongs to an earlier historical period. It is in Raymond Williams's vocabulary a *residual* element in British society. This is true in the very specific sense that the appeal to unity through the castigation of Celtic difference continues to exert limited real power, even though the historical moment at which it arose has long passed.

Raymond Williams's portrayal of Welshness in *Border Country* and *Second Generation* is again associated both with cultural identity and with the work of the university. In his work, however, the role of the university is quite different. Instead of an appeal to national unity, there is a continual exploration of the relations between communities in England and Wales. There is moreover an absolute rejection, in the work of Peter Owen in *Second Generation*, of the use of education to provide success in the capitalist market. Raymond Williams, in other words, re-thinks the university. He envisages it neither as an organ of national-imperial consciousness, nor as an instrument of the transnational capitalist order. He understands the university as a place that promotes critical cultural and political thinking, from which the unequal structuring of capitalist society might be countered. The difference, I have been arguing, springs ultimately from a fundamentally different conception of the university: a university that divides, or a university that connects. The difference, that is, between 'hard' and 'soft' universities.

Chapter Four: Postcolonial Britain

In the Introduction, I suggested that to Raymond Williams, the nation-state was fundamentally an institution of cultural modernity and imperialism. The text in which Williams explores these ideas most fully is *The Country and The City* (1973). Here he attempts an examination of the connections that exist between the capitalist order and the nation-state. He pursues this analysis across a long-term historical period, from the early modern period, right down to the late twentieth century.

In this chapter, I shall offer a reading of *The Country and The City* to extrapolate the extent to which the tradition of country house writing can also be taken as a measure of the shifting imperial system. This is elevated in the work of Williams to a post-imperial theorising of that global process. I then propose to look at the transition that has occurred in the country house tradition of writing since the end of empire. This includes an analysis of Williams's own novel *The Volunteers* (1978), where the relation between country houses and empire is again important. In that novel, the emotional overtone is one of deep-rooted commitment to questioning historical processes.

I conclude the chapter by looking at further transformations that have occurred in the genre of country house writing since 1997, the year of devolution in Scotland and Wales. Historically, this transition is related to the end of imperial power overseas during the 1950s and 60s. The fact that Williams himself did not survive to witness the moment of devolution in no way weakens the impact of his writing. I shall argue that his work anticipates the moment of devolution and the break-up of the British state in important ways, with the result that Williams is a major figure in our understanding of British postcolonial cultures today.

The Country and the World

Williams began *The Country and The City* (1973) by looking at the practice of country house writing as it was inaugurated during the Elizabethan period. The cultural practice at work was one where instituted poets and artisans were commissioned to produce specific pieces of work for specific landed patrons – usually aristocratic men. Within the context of Elizabethan England, and its nascent morality

of virtue and improvement, to eulogise the country house was also taken somehow as eulogising the master. The house was well kept because the master was a shrewd manager. The dinner hall was a place of great feasting and hospitality because the master was generous and giving. The parks and estates were beautifully maintained because the master was understood to be a kind of minor god, carefully controlling the natural order of his own little Eden. According to Williams, 'what we find... is an idealisation of feudal and immediately post-feudal values: of an order based on settled and reciprocal social and economic relations of an avowedly total kind.'[1]

It is a practice of mystification: the servants, labourers and outcasts on whom the entire system depends are entirely written out of the poems so that the only people who appear to matter are the aristocratic lords of the manor. This social order is related by the country house and estate metaphor to the natural landscape and thus presented as timeless, unchanging, natural. It is a mystification at work in the interest of the ruling landed class. As Williams says, 'it is then important that the poems coincide, in time, with a period in which another order – that of capitalist agriculture – was being successfully pioneered' (ibid.) The best-known examples Williams gives of these poems are Ben Jonson's *Penshurst,* Thomas Carew's *To Saxham,* and Andrew Marvell's *Upon Appleton House*. Social and moral economy are mystified within these poems in order to ratify and support the class structure of the patrons.

The second stage of Williams's analysis in *The Country and The City* is to explore the connection between a mystified social capitalist order and an equally mystified concept of national identity and national interest. During the period Williams analysed in *The Country and The City,* the mystifying of the social order was achieved in part by the entrenched tradition of country house writing. I showed in Chapter Two that the cultural materialist argument tells us that literary texts are *both* cause *and* effect of social and political processes. This is particularly evident in the case of Tudor country house writing. The poems were powerful primarily because the landlords who commissioned them were powerful figures, commanding the capacity to dictate literary tastes along with more direct rules on how to govern the estates. At the same time, that authority was also in part derived from the idealisation performed in the poetry.

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[1] Williams, *The Country and the City*, (1973; London: Hogarth, 1985), p.35. Cited hereafter as *CC*.

The magnificence of the country estates was taken to be a measure of the virtue and morality of the landowners, and by a final extension, of the virtue and morality of the nation itself. As Peter de Bolla has written of *The Country and The City,* it shows the enlightenment and imperial attempt to create 'a specifically national heritage' through appeal to the virtue and morality of the system and associated invocation of a supposedly natural order.[2] A growing interest in the English landscape was accompanied by an emotive appeal to the supposedly common origins of those who peopled that landscape, in an eternal and immutable social order. This created a hegemonic sense of united national identity while also mystifying the profoundly disunited character of the nation.

If the literary texts analysed by Williams played a material part in augmenting the power of the country house system domestically, this became even more strongly the case during the period of empire. Macaulay's notorious *Minute on Indian Education* in 1835 proposed to create a generation of colonial subjects 'Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.'[3] Literary study was mobilised throughout the British empire to perform this hegemonic work. This had been the case since the moment at which the colonial project was inaugurated: the Elizabethan period. As Ania Loomba writes of the Tudor dynasty's most tenacious myth maker, 'Shakespeare lived and wrote at a time when English mercantile and colonial enterprise were just germinating... the meaning of Shakespeare's plays were both derived from and used to establish colonial authority.'[4] Cultural materialism as Raymond Williams defined it offers an insight into the connections that exist between the building of the nation during the Tudor period, and the growth of empire overseas. It also provides a materialist reading of the part played by literature in those processes.

Gauri Viswanathan has criticised Raymond Williams for failing to pay sufficient attention to the mutually constitutive relationship that existed between national identity in domestic culture during the period of imperialism, and imperial practice overseas. Viswanathan claims that 'Williams addresses the reciprocal relation of culture and imperialism in arbitrary and fragmented ways, producing in turn a

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[2] See Peter de Bolla, 'Antipictorialism in the English Landscape Tradition: A Second Look at *The Country and the City'* in *Cultural Materialism: On Raymond Williams* ed. Christopher Prendergast, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p.182.
[3] Quoted in Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p.30.
[4] Ania Loomba and Martin Okrin (eds), *Post-Colonial Shakespeares,* (London: Methuen, 1998), p.1.

systematic failure to recognise "Englishness" as an imperial construct.'[5] In some ways this critique is rather too easy to make retrospectively from within the field of postcolonial studies. At the same time it is also somewhat anachronistic to do so. *The Country and The City* was published in 1973, five years before Edward Said's *Orientalism,* and at a time when that field for all practical purposes did not exist.

I suggest that Williams can be understood more positively than Viswanathan would allow, as a kind of postcolonial theorist *avant la lettre*. This is important because my argument implicitly is that the work of a major oppositional figure like Williams was in fact a vital precursor to the establishment of the field that would subsequently become known as postcolonial studies. His decentring of official English modes of knowledge, and the oppositional stance he took towards late imperial England's cultural practices, prepared the way for the greater theoretical and methodological complexity in postcolonial studies that would only subsequently become possible.

The third stage of analysis that Williams opens in *The Country and The City* draws attention to the relation between domestic national culture in formation, and the role played by the colonies in that process. Williams performs this work in a necessarily brief way. His materialism of culture is primarily concerned with theorising the role played by *literary texts* in historical processes. On one hand this limits the scope for analysis of colonial history to its reading artefacts. On the other, this approach enables a theorisation of the material properties of those artefacts.

This point can be demonstrated by comparing two passages from *The Country and The City*. The first addresses the issue of land enclosure during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The second is concerned with imperial practices in Nigeria. Williams describes the effect of land enclosure on rural society in an eighteenth-century village in the following way:

> The inequalities of condition which the village contains and supports are profound, and nobody, by any exercise of sentiment, can convert it into a 'rural democracy' or, absurdly, a commune. The social structure that will be completed after enclosure is already basically outlined. (*CC,* p.102).

[5] Viswanathan, 'Raymond Williams and British Colonialism' in *Cultural Materialism: On Raymond Williams,* ed. Christopher Prendergast, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p.208.

Williams here demonstrates that the process of private land enclosure which enabled the English capitalist system to flourish in the eighteenth century was based on a much older and already established social structure. It is not the case that land enclosure created social division within communities. Social division precedes land enclosure, which is therefore based on this unequal structure, rather than the other way round. Land enclosure as an aspect of the capitalist system actually uses and exacerbates a feudal class structure. The external capitalist exploiter is only able to gain a foothold in the society because of the way in which the society is already structured. Capitalism and land enclosure do not create that structure. The structure precedes them.

This is also what Williams thinks about colonial and imperial practices overseas. The imperial project did not create divided societies or split subjects. Rather, it exploited the divisions within other societies which already existed, and managed to adapt them to its own ends. In each case, the process is essentially the same. Williams employs a striking integration of approach, relating the unfairness and cruelty inherent in domestic capitalist society to similar hierarchical manoeuvres carried out overseas. Just as the class and social division which enabled agrarian capitalism to get under way in England actually pre-dated that process, so too, internal divisions created a space into which imperial power could be inserted and from which colonised societies could be administered. Writing about Chinua Achebe's account of imperial expansion in the novel *Things Fall Apart,* Williams says:

> What is impressive about *Things Fall Apart* is that, as in some English literature of rural change, as late as Hardy, the internal tensions of the society are made clear, so that we can understand the modes of the penetration which would in any case, in its process of expansion, have come... The strongest man, Okwonkwo, is destroyed in a very complicated process of internal contradictions and external invasion. (*CC,* p.286).

The integration of Williams's thinking on capitalism, nation and imperialism should be evident from this consistency of approach. An important feature of this comment is that it is essentially literary-critical, understanding imperial and postcolonial history primarily from its reading artefacts. Thus the profoundest comment he is able to make on the relationship between domestic culture, national identity and imperialism is undertaken exclusively with regard to the *literature* of the period:

> In *Wuthering Heights,* in *Great Expectations,* in *Alton Locke* and in many other novels of the period there is a way out from the struggle within English society to these distant lands; a way out that is not only the escape to a new land but as in some of the real history an acquisition of fortune to return and re-enter the struggle at a higher point... The lands of the Empire were an idyllic retreat, an escape from debt or shame, or an opportunity for making a fortune. (*CC,* p.281).

It is as though the colonies are the training ground for a domestic culture in formation. The metaphor of empire as 'idyllic retreat' extends the country house metaphor Williams had already detected in the poetics of nation-building. Williams suggests that throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the imperial project was partly legitimised by its country house literature. If this is a postcolonial theory, it is a distinctly literary-critical one. As a result, Viswanathan concludes that the scope of Williams's analysis is incomplete. Viswanathan herself goes on to perform a thoroughgoing investigation into the relation between literary study in Britain and in the colonies, especially India, during the nineteenth century. She concludes that literary study was encouraged by the imperial ruling elite for similar reasons in both contexts: to humanise the masses and stave off anarchy.[6] It is interesting that this conclusion strongly echoes Williams's own theoretical approach. It tells us that literary texts had a material part to play in society.

Implicit in this conclusion is the idea that if literary texts have a material role in societal processes, then to produce and disseminate different kinds of texts is to take a step towards altering the structure of society. At the fourth stage of analysis in *The Country and The City*, Raymond Williams turns from national and imperial processes to postcolonial history. He is aware of the pressures towards political change inside late colonial societies, primarily as a result of his reading of the canonical late colonial authors: E.M. Forster, George Orwell, Joyce Cary (*CC,* p.285). 'But,' he writes, 'we have only to go across to the Indian and African and West Indian writers to get a different and necessary perspective' (ibid).

Williams suggests that this perspective on colonial history can be gleaned in the work of writers such as Mulk Raj Anand, Wilson Harris, R. K. Narayan, Chinua Achebe, Han Suyin and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. These writers challenge the model of

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[6] See Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India,* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), pp.6-7.

country house dominance over hinterland/ colony. This can be seen particularly clearly in George Lamming's novel *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953) and V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr Biswas* (published in 1960, the same year as Williams's own novel, *Border Country*).[7] Lamming and Naipaul render the metaphor of the country house all too literal, in dramatising the historical struggles of colonised peoples to gain effective political control over their own estates.

In the chapter of *The Country and The City* entitled 'The New Metropolis', Williams himself extends the country house metaphor. During the period of nation-building, the image of country house and estate had been extended to the more encompassing model of city and countryside, where all the power was assumed to lie in the metropolitan city and all the labour on which this depended was carried out in the countryside: agriculture, farming, mining, milling. The political power of the country house becomes worked up into the political power of metropolitan cities.[8] In a final extension of the metaphor, Williams suggests that the dominance of country house over sprawling estate, and of metropolitan city over hinterland, is comparable to the dominance exerted by the imperial nations over their colonies. This is true of both the colonial period, and the neo-colonial stage that followed formal decolonisation. Within the context of globalisation and extreme inequality between nations and peoples, Williams notes that the myth of the elegant and gentrified country house has been extended to cover the entire developed capitalist world:

> The 'metropolitan' states, through a system of trade, but also through a complex of economic and political controls, draw food and, more critically, raw materials from these areas of supply, this effective hinterland, that is also the greater part of the earth's surface and that contains the great majority of its peoples. Thus a model of city and country, in economic and political relationships, has gone beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, and is seen but also challenged as a model of the world. (*CC*, p.279).

Williams suggests that the western world has become something like an enormous country estate – or an enormous city. It operates with grace and elegance while also blinding itself to the processes of work on which that operation depends. Just as the industrial and agricultural labour on which the country house depends is entirely

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[7] Tony Pinkney has shown that *Border Country* is structured in such a way as to open a perspective from a very local Welsh community onto much broader postcolonial historical processes. See his *Raymond Williams*, (Bridgend: Seren, 1991) p.3 and pp.74-7.

[8] Tom Nairn points out that the seats of power within those cities usually take the form of enormous country houses: Westminster and the White House. See *The Break-Up of Britain*, p.297, p.374.

written out of the country house tradition, so too the industrial labour in the developing world on which the lifestyles of the prosperous nations depend is distanced, dissociated from daily life in the metropolis. In postcolonial and post-industrial Britain, industrial work is devolved upon the developing world, which is thus metaphorically assigned the status of hinterland, or enormous rural estate, providing provisions and sustenance for the country house/ first world.

Williams concludes that 'a model of city and country' is 'seen but also challenged' as a model of the world. The phrase 'seen but also challenged' is central to the theory and practice of cultural materialism. Williams has been criticised for limiting his analysis of postcolonial societies to the *literature* produced within them, and for failing thereby to pay more specific attention to the *political* processes involved.[9] Williams's cultural materialism suggests that literary texts themselves play an admittedly modest yet nevertheless tangible part in those same political processes. By challenging the metaphor of country house dominance *in* their literature, Lamming, Naipaul, Suyin, Anand and Ngugi all contribute in their various ways to making change happen *outside* it.

The Country and The City relates the process of nation-building in the early modern period to that of empire-building throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The material role played by literature in imagining these communities into existence is comparable in each case. Likewise, the potential of literature to participate in changing those structures and re-imagining the community is equally prevalent. The important conjunction Williams makes is between nation-building and imperialism: 'As we gain perspective from the long history of the literature of country and city, we see how much, at different times and in different places, it is a connecting process, in what has to be seen ultimately as a common history' (*CC*, p.288). If the history of the nation is related to the formation of empire, then in the last instance, the break-up of the empire must be related to the break-up of the nation.

Anti-Imperialism and *The Volunteers*

The important conjunction between formal decolonisation overseas and political break-up domestically is raised in Raymond Williams's novel, *The Volunteers. The*

[9] See also Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures,* (London: Verso, 1992), pp.282-83.

Volunteers was published in 1978, and set in a then futuristic late twentieth- century Britain, under the control of an extreme nationalist government. Lewis Redfern, an investigative journalist for the Insatel broadcasting corporation, is assigned to investigate the shooting and wounding of Secretary of State for Wales, Edmund Buxton, during a state visit to the Welsh Folk Museum at Saint Fagan's, outside Cardiff. Buxton had been involved in a government decision taken only a few months earlier, to use military force to break a strike at a steel works in Pontyrhiw. This decision had directly resulted in the death of a worker, Gareth Powell, and thus provoked great resentment against Buxton.

The Volunteers brings into relief two distinct events and explores the relation between them. The two events refuse to neatly cohere, just as Williams refuses to subscribe to the enforced overriding version of unitary British identity. Lewis Redfern's attempt to discover the relation between the breaking of the strike and the Buxton shooting forms the basis of the investigation plot.

The location of the attack on Buxton is significant. Benedict Anderson suggests in *Imagined Communities* that 'museums, and the museumizing imagination, are both profoundly political.'[10] The argument Anderson makes is that the concept of 'provincial' museums enabled the nineteenth-century colonial powers to delineate the borders of their empires culturally, as well as geographically. This is how early museums sprung up in India, Indonesia and French Indo-China. At the same time, such delineation also sowed the seeds of a unified anti-colonial imagination, and would ultimately play a part in the formation of liberation and nationalist movements *against* the great empires. The museum, as with other tools mobilised to augment the strength of nation-state and of empire, ultimately undermined what it was supposed to support.

As an example of how potent a symbol of anti-colonial nationalism a museum can be, Anderson references the murder in 1984 of Arnold Ap, the political leader of the West Papua New Guinean movement for autonomy from Indonesia. Anderson notes that when he was assassinated in 1984, Ap 'was curator of a state-built museum devoted to... provincial culture.'[11] Though *The Volunteers* was published six years before this event, its setting around the aftermath of a political shooting in the Welsh Folk Museum aligns Williams with this anti-colonial perspective on Welsh history.

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[10] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p.178.
[11] Ibid.

Williams himself argued in an essay entitled 'Welsh Culture' that the folk-ish emphasis of the Welsh museum had the effect of denying a sense of cultural modernity to the Welsh people. Not only did it fail to relate 'past' with 'present', but it also displayed exhibits exclusively drawn from 'before the industrial revolution,' and so omitted the 'life and work of the majority of Welsh' people (*RH*, p.100). In other words, the folk museum performed the same hegemonic work that Anderson detects in museums in colonial India and Indonesia. It conjured away the realities of the urban life of the majority of Welsh people. The folk-ish emphasis of the museum thus generated a notion of empty space that was highly pertinent to colonial history.

Since Welsh devolution in 1997, the museum has changed its name from *Welsh Folk Museum* to *Museum of Welsh Life*. With the shift in name has come a shift in emphasis, from the folk-ish and past-looking museum of the colonial imagination, and towards exploration of life in a more confident, contemporary Wales. Thus as Anderson argues, the museum could be variously an instrument for the expansion of the imperial state, *or* a symbol of anti-colonial nationalism.

The shift from one concept of the museum to another was just beginning to occur in Wales in 1978, the year before the first Welsh referendum on self-rule. It is to access these charged historical currents that Williams set the shooting of Buxton in what was still – at that point - the Welsh Folk Museum.

Buxton is not killed in the attack, merely wounded in the legs. 'There was no danger to his life but he was crippled and in great pain.'[12] The wounding of his legs leaves Buxton immobilised, cut off from the country house world whose power he is supposed to embody, and hence strikes at the authority behind that figure. The attack itself is facilitated by a smoke bomb, which leaves the police guard temporarily 'cut off' from the official party (*V*, p.17). The country house system is temporarily denuded of its power in this way.

As in *The Fight for Manod,* the investigation that ensues is 'superficially clear' (*V*, p.10). The police have a distinct image of Buxton's assailant: 'orange cape, with dark glasses and a blue denim cap, and with long fair hair and beard and moustache' (*V*, p.19). Moreover, the police quickly find the getaway car, and discover from the London rental company that it was used by a German student, J. Tiller, who had mentioned that he was 'especially looking forward to visiting Wales' (*V*, p.62).

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[12] Williams, *The Volunteers*, (London: Hogarth, 1985), p.19. Cited hereafter as *V*.

Happily, there is a file about J. Marcus Tiller on the intelligence network database; he is known to be a German radical subversive. The suspect is identified and need only be found.

Lewis realises at once that this is too simple, and launches an alternative investigation. Suspecting a connection between resentment against Buxton over the death of Gareth Powell at Pontyrhiw, and the symbolic shooting at Saint Fagan's, he tries to trace anyone else present at both events. Media photographs enable him to trace Bill Chaney, Rosa Brant and a younger woman called Lucy (*V,* p.53). Rosa Brant turns out to be the sister of Sarah Brant, the young second wife of a politician, Mark Evans. Evans had previously served in the same cabinet as Buxton and is trying to make a populist political come back as an opponent of the repressive Buxton government. Finally it transpires that Evans has been recruited to join the same radical organization, the Volunteers, as Rosa.

Lewis discovers that Rosa's supposed alibi for the Buxton shooting, a camping trip to Ireland, has been manufactured (*V,* p.104). He discovers also that Mark Evans's son, David, has joined the radical underground organization, the Volunteers, to try and resist the compromised sell-out of the political class. Marcus Tiller does not come into the equation. Rosa and her lover Bill Chaney were the ones who shot and wounded Buxton, aided by David Evans. They simply used the pretty girl Lucy to seduce Marcus Tiller, and thus manoeuvre him into a position whence the police will suspect him of the shooting.

What is striking about Lewis's alternative investigation is that it is no less simple than that of the police. The mystery itself rapidly becomes redundant, bankrupt, empty of suspense because effortlessly solved. The police easily come up with the name of Marcus Tiller. Lewis equally effortlessly comes to the opposite conclusion: that Tiller is not involved. In each investigation, there are no twists, no complications and no obstacles. And yet two irreconcilable conclusions are reached. How can Williams think himself out of this impasse? As in *The Fight for Manod* and *Loyalties,* Williams uses the investigation plot to launch all sorts of wider and more complex questions which outflank the basic mystery plot altogether.

For the question that most continually obtrudes into our reading is not *Who shot Buxton*? Rather, it is *Who is Lewis*? Although this character is the first-person narrator of the novel, we know surprisingly little about him. As his sympathy for the Welsh working classes and the subversive organization the Volunteers deepens, we

are bound to ask ourselves why this should be. Indeed, the novel insists on this question: 'For what, in the end, did I care about the Trust...?' muses Lewis (*V*, p.142). 'What is it you want?' Gareth Powell's widow asks him when he comes asking questions. When Lewis finally learns that Mark Evans is working for the Volunteers and struggles to decide whether his loyalties lie with the capitalist establishment or this group of radical opponents, he asks Evans, 'Why should I [help the Volunteers?]' (*V*, p.178).

There is an answer to this question, but unlike the surface mystery plot, Williams does not provide it easily. The clues are not blatant, like the bright orange cape discovered by the police. Neither are they discovered in any logical sequence. In fact, the details about Lewis's personal involvement with the Buxton shooting are rendered piecemeal, fragmented and dispersed, so that our attempt at understanding is continually hampered.

As Lewis Redfern's investigation gathers momentum, there are hints that final understanding will be directly related to his personal affiliations. The whole dilemma facing him is that as an employee of Insatel, his job is to expose the Volunteers. His employer Friedmann is explicit about this. The Buxton affair ceases to be an interesting news story within a couple of days, he explains, 'but the Volunteers now, that's business' (*V*, p.144). Moreover, the possibility that former cabinet minister Mark Evans might be involved with the Volunteers seems like the biggest media coup of all. Hence Friedmann's instructions, 'You zoom in on Evans. You go all out to break him' (*V*, p.145).

On the other hand, having discovered that Evans is working for a political cause with which Lewis too sympathises, Lewis himself is reluctant to carry out this breaking. If Lewis is really to endanger his career in this way (and after all, he does end up resigning from Insatel), we feel certain he must have a bigger reason for sympathising with Mark Evans.

The first hint of this comes when he interviews Evans's wife, Sarah. She is reluctant to provide any information that will cause legal trouble for Mark. He responds by pointing out that he is a journalist, not a police officer. She breaks down this distinction, arguing that as a journalist, he will publish what he finds, so that 'when you tell the public about it, you are actually telling the police' (*V*, pp.116-17). Then again, Lewis responds, he won't necessarily publish his findings, 'for legal reasons, or for my own reasons' (*V*, p.117).

What could those reasons be? His personal affiliation is pointed up, but not explained. What possible motive could Lewis have for holding back the information he has spent an entire novel bringing to light? This, and not the political shooting, is the real mystery of *The Volunteers*. Indeed, when Lewis finally realises that Mark Evans's political affiliations mirror his own, he tells Evans that although he knows about the Volunteers, 'I shan't be reporting it' (*V*, p.161). Evans finds this almost beyond belief – as we must, if we are to take seriously the whole plot up to this point.

Evans provides the next clue as to why Lewis might withhold rather than publish. Lewis accuses him of involvement with the Volunteers and in the Buxton shooting. Evans seems unperturbed by this. He does not deny involvement because he does not regret it. He believes in the rightness of striking out against the oppressive nationalist state. This constitutes something of an anti-climax to Lewis Redfern's investigation. Moreover, Williams throws the real mystery back onto Lewis himself. The ostensibly guilty Evans fires a particular parting shot at Lewis:

> "Just one thing before you go," he said as we walked down the stairs. "You research a lot of people. At least it's called research. It's an interesting process. We even tried it on you."
> "Don't rely on my past," I said, irritably.
> "No," he said, laughing. "There was never any danger of that. But it's interesting. It's especially interesting when the present connects."
> We had got to the door.
> "I'm not the problem," I said stubbornly. (*V*, pp.163-64).

The idea that Lewis could have a reliable past is presented as laughable. This seems ironic, given that it is Evans and not Lewis who has been shown to be a member of a terrorist organization. Williams uses a technique of disadvantaging the reader here. For though it is clear that Evans and Lewis are meant to understand each other, we as readers do not know what they are talking about. We cannot know what it is in Lewis's past that Evans is referring to - or how it connects to the present. Had the Volunteers considered Lewis a possible ally? A possible enemy? A possible target? There is an appearance of knowledge and answers, but this is continually frustrated. Lewis's personal involvement with the matter under investigation is both pointed up, and continually deferred. Despite his assertion that 'I am not the problem,' for us as readers, Lewis *has* become the real object of the mystery, rather than the terrorist he is investigating.

At Lewis's final meeting with Evans, Evans explains to him his reasons for working with the Volunteers. The reasons are simple: the current military-industrial complex of capitalist society is failing and needs to be changed. 'We are rotten with failure, all of us rotten. You must know this. You particularly' (*V,* p.176). Nothing in the novel so far has prepared us to feel that there is anything particular in Lewis that might cause him to turn against the establishment. Why seems it so particular with him?

With the question of who shot Buxton and the discovery of the Volunteers in effect concluded, this becomes the real question. What is it in Lewis's past that will enable us to understand his present? Who is he? Why does he suddenly begin to sympathise with a radically subversive political organization, to the extent of endangering his own career? As in the earlier Williams novels, the mystery plot opens up all sorts of broader questions.

The counter-research which the Volunteers have carried out on Lewis offers some conclusions. Lewis finally decides to help the Volunteers, first by not publishing his research and then by presenting anonymous documents at the Ponytrhiw inquiry, demonstrating Buxton's direct involvement in the killing of Gareth Powell. This makes him the Volunteers' 'comrade' (*V,* p.192), and they his. As a result, David Evans offers to help smuggle him out of the country, to protect him from the 'dirty' tricks (*V,* p.194) that will otherwise be played to 'discredit' his testimony at the inquiry (*V,* p.206). David suggests:

> "Get out of the community. You've got a wife in Canada, haven't you?"
> "There's no use. We've split."
> "Since you worked for Insatel?"
> "Since I worked for Insatel. Since I got this political assignment."
> "Yes, that's what I'd heard. Since you'd become their creep."
> "You know nothing about it."
> "It's what she said, Lewis."
> I jerked involuntarily. It was a moment of total surprise, total shock.
> (*V,* p.194).

Lewis's reaction to this is shared by us as readers. Yet his shock is different from ours. We are surprised at Lewis having a wife. This information has not previously been forthcoming. Lewis's surprise is different: he is shocked that David Evans has traced this estranged wife to Canada, and actually spoken to her. He is shocked that he, the investigator, has in effect become the investigated.

This holds the key to the whole mystery of Lewis's affiliation and identity. He cannot go and stay with his wife, Megan, because their break-up was not an amicable one. David knows this already - he has actually spoken to Megan. Megan apparently has informed David that the reason for the break-up of their marriage was ideological: Lewis had once worked in 'radical journalism' (*V,* p.194). When he started working for the establishment broadcasting company, Insatel, Megan perceived Lewis to have travestied his earlier political ideals, and become, in David's word, 'their creep.' Megan seems to have found this intolerable. Moreover, David reports, Megan has also told him 'other things':

> "More than that, Lewis. Your father was killed as a soldier in Kenya. As a national service soldier. But in one of the very worst of the last colonial wars."
> I didn't answer for some moments. I avoided looking at him.
> "He had no choice where he was sent."
> "Of course, Lewis. Imperialism killed him, whichever uniform he happened to be wearing. But you didn't think so. You told no one but Megan. You seemed bitterly ashamed."
> "Angry."
> "No, anger is public. You told none of your comrades. You wanted none of them to know. You let it fester under your exceptional activism. You divided yourself." (*V,* p.195).

The clues click into place at last. Why does Lewis side with the Volunteers against the Buxton government? He hates the entire military-industrial construction of society for which that government stands. He hates it because it killed his father in Kenya. Yet he is also deeply ashamed by it, for his father died, fighting needlessly on its behalf. The Mau Mau uprising against British rule in Kenya in the 1950s was one of the most violent guerrilla wars of the whole colonial period. The imperial order tried to dig in and hold onto its own power and authority in the face of global dissolution, and Lewis's father was part of the digging. Lewis had earlier been a student radical, working against imperialism and social injustice. The death of his father fighting on behalf of that system seems to have made Lewis's own position untenable. As a defence mechanism he has 'divided' himself, becoming part radical investigator, part establishment lackey. That is why he has sympathised with the Volunteers all along, while at the same time working for an organization hell-bent on their annihilation.

I suggested above that one of the anti-colonial writers whom Raymond Williams most positively evaluates in *The Country and The City* is Kenyan novelist Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. Ngugi's political activities in opposition to continuing imperial

oppression, the contribution of his novels to that activism, and his own refusal to separate his activities into the demarcated spheres of *politics* and *letters*, distinctly parallel Williams's own work. It is interesting then to go to the work of Ngugi to see this process of colonial split-subject formation at work.

Ngugi has written of his education and development in colonial Kenya in the 1950s. He was educated by a teacher who had been discharged from the Royal Air Force, in an English colonial school. The reading material he was given included the imperial boy's own adventures of *Captain Biggles* – a childhood hero of Ngugi's. Yet a crisis of loyalties occurred for Ngugi when the Mau Mau uprising against colonial rule broke out – and when his brother joined the revolutionaries. The Mau Mau fighters were defeated by the Royal Air Force, dropping bombs on the mountain strongholds of the revolutionaries. Ngugi's own brother and comrades were being bombed by people like his teacher, and like his boyhood hero Captain Biggles. Thus, Ngugi concludes, his education in late colonial Kenya was 'a drama of contradictions', which rendered his unquestioning obeisance to the imperial order impossible.[13]

Raymond Williams's positive valuation of Ngugi's work is two-fold. Firstly, Williams thinks that Ngugi's work enables us to dispute the official metropolitan account of colonial history. Secondly, this in turn teaches us something about our own society. The colonial split subjectivity that Williams portrays in Lewis Redfern in *The Volunteers,* and that Ngugi recalls from his boyhood, enables us to open this post-imperial perspective on Britain itself. This is done by suggesting a comparability between colonial processes at home and abroad. In *The Country and The City* Williams makes this conjunction in more depth:

> In Britain itself, within the home islands, the colonial process itself is so far back that it is in effect unrecorded, though there are late consequences of it in the rural literature of Scotland and Wales and especially of Ireland. It has become part of the long settlement which is idealised as Old England or the natural economy: the product of centuries of successive penetration and domination. What is important in this modern literature of the colonial peoples is that we can see the history happening, see it being made, from the base of an England which, within our own literature, has been so differently described. (*CC,* p.285).

[13] Ngugi, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms,* (London: Heinemann, 1993), pp.136-41 (p.138).

These are the two elements of Williams's positive evaluation of anti-colonial literature. It gives us a perspective on colonial history that would otherwise be completely unrecorded – even in the liberal but nevertheless metropolitan writing of George Orwell and E.M. Forster. It then enables us to relate the construction – or otherwise – of the British empire to the construction – or contestation – of the British state.

The Country and The City illuminates the climax of *The Volunteers* by making these conjunctions. During the final section of *The Country and The City,* Williams extends his metaphor of the country house dominating its impoverished hinterland, to describe the relations between Europe and its colonies, first world and third. He then goes on to discuss resistance to the colonial system:

> Out of these country areas there eventually came, through blood and struggle, movements for political independence. At various stages, to protect such an order, young officers from the country-houses led other Englishmen, and the expropriated Irish and Scots and Welsh, to the colonial battles in which so many died. It is a strange fate. (*CC,* p.283).

Out of the country houses of ruling-class England, imperial military officers were sent to police the imperial order overseas, with some dying in the process. This is exactly the fate of Lewis's father in *The Volunteers*. Out of a disjointed series of clues as to Lewis's identity, suddenly there is coherence. His distrust of country estate-owning Mark Evans, and his interest in the shooting of Buxton inside the grounds of a country house/ seat of power, can both be traced to this filial relation to the imperial system.

This understanding retrospectively underwrites the whole plot of *The Volunteers,* showing it to be a profoundly anti-imperialist work. Williams is in no doubt that the Welsh and Scots and Irish who died fighting on behalf of the imperial system were 'expropriated', forced into fighting. His novel thus implicitly questions that whole enforced kind of nationalism, and instead puts that unitary identity in question.

When viewed in this way, *The Volunteers* is actually a profoundly predictive novel. For when we re-read those scenes about the Buxton shooting retroactively, armed with this new knowledge of Lewis's hatred of the colonial system, what shines through is the way in which Wales itself is governed in unequal relation by a

muscular London government. The significance of Buxton is explained in the following way:

> Since the Welsh senate was established, in the initial devolution of powers under the second coalition government, the Financial Commission had been the political storm-centre. For what the devolution said, in effect, was this: you can govern yourselves, on this range of issues, within the limits of the money we are prepared to allocate to you.... It became apparent, above all, in the figure of the Financial Commission's Secretary of State (Wales). He was supposed to be an impartial figure... But of course, he was political, and through his office flowed all the fierce currents of political conflict between an impatient people and a constrained, fatigued and impoverished administration. (*V*, p.11).

By imagining a Wales ruled by a devolved government of its own as early as 1978, Williams attempted to raise the levels of Welsh self-consciousness to a sufficiently high level for self-rule to become a reality in the 1979 devolution referendum. The 'no' vote in 1979 followed by the eventual 'yes' in 1997 shows that all the time, this critical consciousness was on the rise. Tom Nairn has warned that devolution in Scotland and Wales will be meaningless if it is implemented simply as a minimal concession, denying any real self-determination to the people of Scotland and Wales while also allaying the demand for further political change.[14] This is the scenario that Williams too seems to warn against in *The Volunteers*.

The interesting conjunction Williams makes in *The Volunteers* is between the decolonising process overseas and the gradual break-up of the British Union itself. Although there are complications and differences, Williams implies that these processes are somehow related. In the novel, after Lewis gives testimony at the Pontyrhiw tribunal, he drives to the steel works where Gareth Powell was shot, and sees bullet marks still on the walls:

> We stopped and looked at the gate of the depot. It was still shut. The fading chalk bullet-marks were still on the walls along the street. A street in Pontyrhiw. A dirt road in Kenya. I must have gone silent looking at them... (*V*, p.207).

Imperial violence in Kenya is juxtaposed directly with radical authoritarian violence back in Wales. This extraordinary and moving moment retrospectively informs the whole construction of *The Volunteers*. As in the previous novels by Williams, the investigation plot provides not answers, but questions. For at this moment, we have

[14] Nairn, *After Britain*, p.43.

left the Buxton-Powell mystery behind altogether. We are invited to ask much bigger questions: What is identity? What is nationality? What is loyalty? Williams's opposition to the imperial order reveals the break-up of the empire and the break-up of the union to be part of the same process.

Devolving *Frankenstein*

Raymond Williams was aware that all nations are at root imagined communities. The correlate of this is that the break-up of the nation is also largely an imagined event – hence the utility of considering that event through a fully historical reading of the literature which imagines it into existence.

I showed in Chapters Two and Three that Williams was involved in two quite distinct literary traditions: that of Welsh working-class industrial writing; and that of middle-class university writing. If we add to this Williams's interest in the thriller genre, as manifest in *Loyalties* and *The Volunteers,* and his more general interest in country house writing, we can glimpse the extent to which Williams was constantly traversing generic, disciplinary and national boundaries. The different traditions in which Williams was involved as a novelist have greatly multiplied and developed since his death. Retrospectively, this enables me to argue that Williams was more of an innovator than he is usually given credit for. At the same time, the realist form in which Williams couched his ideas has itself been superseded by a greater degree of formal experimentation, in what we now refer to as *postmodern fiction.*

If we leave aside this matter of formal innovation, however, we find that at the thematic level there is a good deal of continuity between Williams's fiction and more recent postmodernist work. Williams's problematic identity anticipated a break-up of a consensus-based national identity, in a way that would prove to be a dynamic catalyst for more creative work freed from the burden of such an identity.

Historically, this is most evident in relation to devolution and self-rule in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Recent literature from these nations has emphasised a lack of united British-ness. Indeed, in many cases, such as Alasdair Gray's novel *Poor Things* (1992), the literature imagined the break-up into being long before the actual moment of devolution. *Poor Things* is an explicit re-write of the Gothic classic, *Frankenstein,* set in Victorian Glasgow. Interestingly, around the

moment of devolution, we also find a re-worked Welsh *Frankenstein,* appearing in Malcolm Pryce's 2003 novel, *Last Tango in Aberystwyth.* Gray and Pryce have submitted *Frankenstein* to a process of devolution. Historically, this would have been more difficult at an earlier date, because the literary consciousness of Scotland and Wales was too deeply submerged within the British mainstream. With the steady rise of Scottish and Welsh consciousness came a complicating of the ways in which the literature produced within those nations related to the British whole because the ways in which the nations themselves related were changing.[15]

Since 1997, English literature has been devolved just as much as political power and representation has been devolved from Westminster to Edinburgh and Cardiff.[16] The general historical movement is one away from a direct and traceable repetition of English literary trends inside Scotland and Wales, towards a greater willingness to explore different forms. Williams shows himself to be aware of the challenges in this, when he asserts that his own novels were a deliberate reaction against earlier versions of stage Welshmen: 'garrulous eccentrics' (*WSW,* p.120). He felt it necessary to 'get away from the perception of the Welsh that it seemed to project to the outside world' because this garrulous form was the only 'way the Welsh could present themselves to a London audience' and as such was tantamount to 'a form of cultural subordination' (ibid). Tom Nairn has said the same about the so-called 'Kailyard' school of Scottish writers before World War Two. The novels are replete with images of stage Scotsmen, and this needs to be challenged from within Scotland via a discovery of a new confident identity.[17]

Gray and Pryce are not simply imitators of a literary aesthetic prescribed from literary London. They are typical of a later generation of writers, including Janice Galloway, A.L. Kennedy, Agnes Owens, and Irvine Welsh (in Scotland); and Trezza Azzopardi, Niall Griffiths, Christopher Meredith and Catherine Merriman (in Wales).[18] It is not so much that these writers write specifically about Scotland or Wales. They simply are Scottish and Welsh novelists. The assertion of a different

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[15] One of the few commentators to relate the work of Williams to the growth of Welsh confidence generally is J.P. Ward. See his *Raymond Williams,* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1981), p.9 and p.73.

[16] I have taken this idea from Robert Crawford's *Devolving English Literature,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000).

[17] Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain,* pp.158-62.

[18] My attention was drawn to the Scottish writers mentioned here by Ian Bell in his 'Introduction' to *Peripheral Visions: Images of Nationhood in Contemporary British Fiction,* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995), p.3. The list is not – and not intended to be – exhaustive.

cultural identity is more confident and more possible today than at an earlier period. This in turn can be read in tandem with the process of undoing to which the United Kingdom has more recently become subject. Since devolution has to be understood as an ongoing process rather than an accomplished fact, it can be said that this writing plays a part in the continuing process. It helps both readers and writers to explore and construct their cultural identity.

One of the techniques employed in the post-Frankenstein novels of Gray and Pryce is that of the mystery plot. By posing the process of scientific creation of human life as a mystery which can be solved, these writers are able to use the literary progeny of their imaginary scientists to question the structure of the society into which they are created. This is the most innovative variation brought into the *Frankenstein* mould by Gray and Pryce. They do not imagine the progeny as a monster or a threat. Rather, the offspring of their scientists' endeavours are posed as children and outsiders; people who cannot understand the workings of the world around them and so question them. It is a technique which, as Dorothy McMillan puts it, 'gives monstrosity a good name.'[19]

At the end of the first novel in Pryce's *Aberystwyth* series, *Aberystwyth Mon Amor,* master villain Dai Brainbocs has fled to South America with beautiful singer Myfanwy Montez. His assistants Mrs Llantrisant and Dai Custard Pie are imprisoned respectively on an island off the Aberystwyth coast, and in a cell thirty metres below Aberystwyth castle. Herod Jenkins is presumed dead, after falling from a plane.

The assumption is wrong. Herod has survived, living wild in the woods around Aberystwyth. He is taken in by the mysterious 'Philanthropist' who runs the Ysbyty Ystwyth project. Detective Louie Knight learns from the crime reporter Meirion that this hospital is home to a military-scientific project in memory control and identity grafting.

The philanthropist is Dai Brainbocs. He has used Herod Jenkins as a guinea pig in legislated memory experiments. He claims to have invented a machine to graft new identities onto existing human subjects. Herod Jenkins is only a trial, converted from school games teacher and part-time gangster to wild man of the woods. What Dai Brainbocs really wants to do is graft a new identity onto Myfanwy Montez, make

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[19] Dorothy McMillan, 'Constructed out of bewilderment: stories of Scotland' in *Peripheral Visions: Images of Nationhood in Contemporary British Fiction* ed. Ian A. Bell, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995), p.87.

her 'forget' that she is in love with Louie and 'remember' that she is in love with Dai himself.

Unlike Shelley's Frankenstein, there are two progenies here rather than one. Readers do not sympathise with the fate of Herod Jenkins, as he is known to be a school games teacher and a bully, who had earlier sent Louie's friend Marty out for a cross country run in a blizzard – to his death. Also unlike Shelley's novel, Myfanwy is not in fact created by the Frankenstein figure, Dai Brainbocs. The machine is an elaborate ruse to deceive Louie into thinking that Myfanwy is lost to him forever. When Louie calls Dai's bluff and unplugs the equipment supposedly keeping her alive, he discovers Myfanwy herself – mind and body – still very much alive in another room in the house. The attributing of human emotion to the monster which we find in Shelley is not operative here, since Myfanwy is not the monster to Dai's Frankenstein. In this way, Pryce switches attention from the individual version of identity and directs our focus onto the social and collective process of its formation. Myfanwy is not simply created by Dai. She is a fully historical subject.

Thus unlike Shelley, Pryce is able to suggest that the creating has not really been carried out by the crazed scientist at all. From this point attention is switched to the social and historical factors that have made Herod, Myfanwy, Louie and Dai the people they are. At the conclusion of *Last Tango in Aberystwyth*, its detective narrator Louie Knight discovers the reason for Herod Jenkins's habit of bullying schoolchildren: he had lost his own child years earlier and spent his subsequent career venting repressed emotion through violence. Louie wonders:

> Could I blame him? Could any of us really be blamed for becoming what we had no power to avoid becoming?... But is it enough to blame the Furies? It was hard to know...[20]

As with Raymond Williams's novel, *The Volunteers,* the investigation leads to a point where further questions can only be asked, not answered. Like Williams, Pryce uses the investigation plot to open up these bigger questions about identity. Although Pryce does not make an explicit connection between identity and nation, as Williams does, it is nevertheless significant that this is a Welsh novel. It is produced from within a gradually emerging post-imperial society, and is written in

[20] Malcolm Pryce, *Last Tango in Aberystwyth,* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), p.249.

contradistinction to the earlier unitary British national identities that we would find in, say, *Frankenstein.*[21]

This is also the case in Alasdair Gray's 1992 post-*Frankenstein* novel, *Poor Things*. Gray transplants *Frankenstein* into a late nineteenth-century Glasgow setting. His scientist, Godwin Baxter (or 'God') has been working on finding ways of preserving life in the bodies of people drowned in the city's canal – by inserting alternative brains into them. The result is Bella Caledonia: the daughter of Scotland. She is recreated form the body of Lady Victoria Blessinton, who had drowned herself in the weir to escape the cruelty of her husband, Sir Aubrey de la Pole Blessinton. At the time of the drowning, she was carrying a child, and it is the brain of this unborn child which Godwin Baxter transplants into her head to make a new life – Bella.

The important fact about the progeny of this scientist compared to Shelley's hideous progeny is that Bella is both a woman and a child – in the strongly patriarchal world of Victorian Britain. As a result of being both a grown woman *and* a child, Bella is able to see the world as adults see it, but without the learned inherited prejudices of adults.

The technique of centring a novel on a naïve narrator who is freed from the conventions of the society in which (s)he is trapped has deep roots in postcolonial literatures. Tony Tanner has drawn attention to the 'voice of the outlaw' in early nineteenth-century American fiction.[22] He relates this outlaw voice, or voice of unofficial culture, to that process whereby the cultural and literary aesthetics of a dominant culture are called into question by a subordinate one in the process of discovering itself. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o has more succinctly described it as the *liberation of the mind.*[23]

That is what we find in *Poor Things*. In order to complete Bella's education, God takes her on a world tour. Upon her return, she falls in a childish kind of love with God's student Archibald McCandless. This frustrates God, who, as with Brainbocs in the Pryce novel, was planning to marry his creation himself. Before Bella marries McCandless, she goes on another world tour with a brief lover, Duncan

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[21] Gayatri Spivak provides a more rigorous extrapolation of *Frankenstein* as an imperialist text than there is room for here in her 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism' in *Race, Writing and Difference* ed. Henry Louis Gates, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp.273-75.
[22] Tanner, *The Reign of Wonder: Naivety and Reality in American Literature,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p.127.
[23] Ngugi, *De-Colonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature,* (London: Heinemann, 1994), *passim.*

Wedderburn. They spend some time on a yacht with an English aristocrat, Harry Astley, and an American missionary, Dr Hooker. Bella's confused dialogues with these figures form the majority of her section of the multi-textual novel.

Over the course of several conversations, Bella questions Astley and Hooker about why there is poverty and inequality in the world. In other words, Gray uses the voice of outsider Bella Caledonia to ask fundamental questions of social justice. Hooker and Astley respond with a series of classic imperialist assumptions: that inequality is inevitable; that it is the European man's burden to civilise North Africa and Asia; that the 'natives' of these places are godless, corrupt and dirty; and that Bella, a mere woman, should not worry her head with these matters.

As the ship nears the end of its voyage, Bella summarises her lessons from Astley under a series of neat notebook headings: Women; Education; History; Benefits of War; Unemployment; Freedom; Free Trade; Empire; Self-Government and World-Improvers. They each recapitulate the central theme of the European civilising mission. The entry on education may be regarded as typical:

> "Very poor children learn to beg, lie and steal from their parents – they would hardly survive otherwise. Prosperous parents tell their children that nobody should lie, steal or kill, and that idleness and gambling are vices. They then send them to schools where they suffer if they do not disguise their thoughts and feelings and are taught to admire killers and stealers like Achilles and Ulysses, William the Conqueror and Henry the Eighth. This prepares them for life in a land where rich people use acts of parliament to deprive the poor of homes and livelihoods, where unearned incomes are increased by stock-exchange gambling, where those who own most property work least and amuse themselves by hunting, horse-racing and leading their country into battle. You find the world horrifying, Bell, because you have not been warped to fit it by a proper education." [24]

The education Bella receives about the imperial world order recalls Benedict Anderson's notion – discussed in the Introduction – of the 'reassuring use of fratricide.' That is, the ways in which official narratives of a nation are used to mystify the violence on which they are founded. Using the naïve narrator is Gray's technique for exploring the central issues that I have highlighted over the last two chapters. Gray, like Raymond Williams, subtly suggests that there is a tie-in between class division and capitalism on one hand, and state-building and imperialism on the other.

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[24] Alasdair Gray, *Poor Things*, (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), pp.155-56.

The Break-Up of Britain

I am arguing that the break-up of the empire and the break-up of the unitary state are related processes. The precise utility of understanding those processes through a reading of their literature is this: the literature does not merely passively reflect the social changes in question. Rather, it imagines new forms of relation into existence and therefore anticipates the changes in advance of their occurrence. The Gray novel demonstrates this quite clearly: published in 1992, it imagines devolution into existence five years before the event.

In my Introduction, I drew attention to Benedict Anderson's idea that all nations are *imagined* communities. I also suggested that there was a strong area of overlap between Anderson's work and Raymond Williams's practice of cultural materialism. In an important late essay entitled 'The Culture of Nations', Williams supplements Anderson's notion of *imagined community* with an accompanying sense of *who* is doing the imagining: 'the building of states at whatever level is intrinsically a ruling-class operation.'[25] Williams goes on to explore the correlation between imagined versions of the nation and the ruling sector of it:

> When children start going to school they often learn for the first time that they are English or British or what may be. The pleasure of learning is attached to the song of a monarch or a flag. The sense of friends and neighbours is attached to a distant and commanding organization: in Britain, now, that which ought to be spelled as it so barbarously sounds – the United Kingdom, the "Yookay." Selective versions of the history underlying this impressed identity are regularly presented, at every level from simple images and anecdotes to apparently serious textbook histories. The powerful feelings of wanting to belong to a society are then in a majority of cases bonded to these large definitions. ('Culture of Nations,' p.182).

This passages recapitulates the argument that I analysed in Chapter Three: that education on a top-down model fulfils the needs of the dominant sector of society through the seductive pleasure of learning. It is an under-recognised feature of Williams's work that he emphasised again and again the need for socialist change to occur in the historic *imagination* quite as much as in political and material *reality*. As he had already written in 1975, 'the task of a successful socialist movement will be

[25] Williams, 'The Culture of Nations' in *T2000*, p.181. Cited hereafter as 'Culture of Nations.'

one of feeling and imagination quite as much as one of fact and organization' (*RH,* p.76). The utility of examining the literature which I analysed earlier in this chapter is that such analysis enables us to witness this process taking place.

Since the creation of the nation *as* ruling class takes its deepest hold in the imagination of the people, Williams knows that it is important to be able to imagine alternative versions of identity inside the mind, before change can occur on the outside. This is the advantage of considering the literature, which imagines the change into being. At the same time, since the task of imagining and re-negotiating national communities is self-evidently a large one, it is clear that the novels of Gray and Pryce do not stand alone. They instantiate a much broader historical process, that could be found occurring in a whole seam of literature from the period surrounding devolution.[26] This is also true of other cultural forms such as film, as I shall show in the final chapter.

It is important to understand that Williams advocates this kind of nationalism, not out of abstract chauvinism or ethnic pride, but out of a strong sense of the need for democracy: finding the means by which people can direct their own lives. This matters because the question has then to be seen less as a matter of how English imperial institutions frustrate national aspirations in the peripheral areas of Scotland and Wales, and more a matter of how the ruling-class version of nationhood hinders effective democracy at every level, including within England itself. Williams himself draws attention to the problem – and a potential solution:

> A friend from the north of England said to me recently that the Welsh and Scots were lucky to have these available national self-definitions, to help them find their way out of the dominance of English ruling-class minority culture. In the north, he said, we who are English are in the same sense denied; what the world knows as English is not our life and feelings, and yet we don't, like the Welsh or the Scots, have this simple thing, this national difference, to pit against it. (*WSW,* p.10).[27]

Williams becomes aware of a problem faced by certain English people, wanting the same democratic institutions as the nationalist movements in Scotland and Wales, yet

[26] For a detailed analysis of the Welsh writing in question, see Jane Aaron and M. Wynn Thomas, 'Pulling You Through Changes: Welsh Writing in English Before, Between and After Two Referenda' in *Welsh Writing in English* ed. M. Wynn Thomas (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp.278-309.

[27] This friend is Fred Inglis, who recounts the same incident in his biography, *Raymond Williams,* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.258.

lacking the easy definition of nationhood. He suggests that this lack of national element should free those regions from an emotional burden, and allow them to get more directly to the heart of the real problems. The emotional pull of nationhood can be a barrier to the deeper issues of social class, and an alien and unequal social order. Lacking the national element, then, the English regions should be able to address these problems more – rather than less – directly than in Scotland and Wales. As Williams puts it in another essay entitled 'Are We Becoming More Divided?', 'this means, among other things, that a nationalist movement isn't the only way, often isn't the way at all, to work for these things.' (*WSW*, p.189). The great advantage of considering the renegotiation of British identity that occurs in contemporary and postmodern fiction is that it gives us a sense of some of the different specific and variable means by which people explore their identity.

This is admittedly a rather modest claim for the work of fiction.[28] It is not directly concerned with the establishment of alternative political formations, in the way that Williams himself advocated. Change needs to occur in the imagination as much as in reality, and this is the important work that fiction can conduct. It has the crucial advantage that it enables a sense of how change can be imagined into existence. Thus cultural materialism tells us that literary products are not simply passive reflections on a set of anterior social relations. They also contribute actively to the formation of new relations.

So far I have concentrated on a historical narrative, charting the relation between literature and society from late modernism, through the break-up of the empire and beyond this into the period of devolution and self-rule in the different nations of Britain. I must stress however that I am not proposing a teleological narrative in which devolution could be staged as the logical end-point of empire. What I wish to stress is the different ways in which different writers imagine social and national relations.

The imaginative break-up of the union that I am exploring in fiction is not simply a literary history of devolution. It also registers the break-down of national consensus and belonging along several other sets of coordinates. There are a number of different terrains on which the united nature of the unitary British state has been questioned or negotiated. These include Celtic difference but are not limited to it.

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[28] On the modest political work carried out in cultural studies see Gayatri Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, (Chichester: University of Columbia Press, 2003), p.27.

Other examples of such terrains include regional identity, feminism, and racial difference. These terrains of renegotiation can all be explored in the fiction that implicitly puts deeper questions to the unitary state.

The break-up of Britain then is not solely a matter of devolution in Scotland and Wales. The danger in suggesting otherwise would be that it would invoke a linear history and strictly teleological mode of temporality where, implicitly, devolution would become synonymous with postmodernism in a manner that would leave England itself trailing in its wake. By emphasising the non-synchronous aspect of postmodern literary creation I have avoided this distorted position. The break-up of the nation-state is an imaginary event which occurs on a number of different conceptual terrains.

Thus postmodernist fiction throws up an opportunity for explorations of the concept of Englishness quite as much as it offers the post-devolution nations of Britain an opportunity to develop their own voices.[29] There is an exploration of outdated class-bound notions of Englishness in Graham Swift's 1995 novel, *Last Orders*, and a parody of the stereotypical cultural artefacts of England in Julian Barnes's, *England, England* (1998).[30] From the feminist perspective, A.S. Byatt's *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978) is a satire of the pageantry of monarchic culture. Shena Mackay's *Heligoland* (2003) retreats from the public sphere altogether, and withdraws into a smaller, private community. Andrea Levy's 2004 novel, *Small Island,* juxtaposes national myths of military heroism with a plot that is distinctly unheroic.

The Levy novel is worth mentioning for it hints at another important way in which the British identity has been renegotiated in postmodern fiction – through the lens of specific ethnic communities. Raymond Williams has been accused of paying too little regard to the institutionalised racism experienced on a daily basis by members of Britain's ethnic subcultures.[31] In 'The Culture of Nations' Williams draws attention to a deeper theoretical problem:

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[29] Paul Gilroy discusses the need for the political break-up of the British state to be accompanied by a new definition of Englishness in his *After Empire,* (London: Routledge, 2004), p.105.
[30] On Swift's ironic critique of outmoded versions of Englishness see Emma Parker, 'No Man's Land: Masculinity and Englishness in Graham Swift's *Last Orders*' in *Posting the Male: Masculinities in Post-War and Contemporary British Literature* ed. Berthold Schoene, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), pp.90-103. Tom Nairn discusses the Julian Barnes novel in *After Britain*, p.85.
[31] See Francis Mulhern, '*Towards 2000*, or News From You-Know-Where' in *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives* ed. Terry Eagleton, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), pp.87-90.

> [T]he most active legal (and communal) defence of dislocated and exposed groups and minorities is essential. But it is a serious misunderstanding, when full social relations are in question, to suppose that the problems of social identity are resolved by formal definitions. For unevenly and at times precariously, but always through long experience substantially, an effective awareness of social identity depends on actual and sustained social relationships. To reduce social identity to formal legal definitions, at the level of the state, is to collude with the alienated superficialities of 'the nation' which are the limited functional terms of the modern ruling class. ('Culture of Nations,' p.195).

In one sense Williams could be said to be too keen to overlook the hard-won recognition and legal equality gained by members of Britain's immigrant population in the years after 1945. Yet his point is not that legal equality is not important. It is rather that a legal definition of identity alone is not enough to provide mature cultural expression and growth. In this sense, the purely passport sense of Britishness is of vital legal importance in guaranteeing freedom and equality to members of Britain's ethnic minorities, while at the same time also being inadequate to answer any of the long hard questions about community. The passport sense of identity is then one facet of the wider paraphernalia of statehood - flags, anthems and icons – which can be mobilised in support of the radical right even while offering to define a more inclusive national community.

The problem can be more intuitively seen in Salman Rushdie's 1988 novel, *The Satanic Verses*. It is a great irony of Rushdie's novel that the Islamic controversy which surrounded its publication has deflected attention away from the main thrust of its satire. *The Satanic Verses* is a committed satire on the lives and treatment of London's racial and ethnic communities during the Thatcher era, culminating in the Brixton race riots. The main protagonists, Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta, are Indian actors who have come to Britain because they admire its civilised culture – and reject their own. In other words, they are archetypal postcolonial split subjects – like Lewis Redfern in Raymond Williams's novel, *The Volunteers*.

Allowing for the well-documented innovation of Rushdie's magical realism, there is a surprising congruence between Rushdie's novel and Williams's interests. Upon entry to Britain, Saladin is immediately seized by Inspector Stein's immigration police and beaten up. As Williams may have predicted, the discovery among the police that Saladin is in fact a British citizen and not an illegal immigrant does not solve his problems:

> Stein said: 'Better check him out.' Three and a half minutes later the Black Maria came to a halt and three immigration officers, five constables and one police driver held a crisis conference – *here's a pretty effing pickle* – and Chamcha noted that in their new mood all nine had begun to look alike, rendered equal and identical by their tension and fear. Nor was it long before he understood that the call to the Police National Computer, which had promptly identified him as a British citizen first class, had not improved his situation, but had placed him, if anything, in greater danger than before.[32]

A British passport is not the answer to Saladin's problems: it causes the police to fear recriminations for beating him. They thus beat him further and leave him abandoned. Again, as Raymond Williams may have foreseen, Saladin then seeks a more substantive identity than its merely passport version, by taking refuge at the Shaandaar Café, run by Mr and Mrs Sufyan, and home to a number of other racial outsiders in Margaret Thatcher's prosperous 80s London. A sub-cultural community is formed in this way, with Mrs Sufyan as its matriarch:

> And what was it that made them a living in this Vilayet of her exile, this Yuké of her sex-obsessed husband's vindictiveness? What? (248).

The answer to this rhetorical question is that it is the cooking of Mrs Sufyan that keeps the business going financially. Moreover, at a much deeper cultural level it is also this process that keeps the sub-cultural community together in the face of disintegration – which culminates in Rushdie's dramatisation of the Brixton riots. It is interesting that Rushdie's 'Yuké recalls Williams's 'Yookay.' *The Satanic Verses* performs in fiction what Williams attempted in *The Volunteers* and theorised in a more coherent way in 'The Culture of Nations' and 'Are We Becoming More Divided?' That is, a critique of the limiting and residually imperial construction of the Yookay, and a deeper exploration of precise local communities. Saladin, Gibreel, Mr and Mrs Sufyan, the characters who meet at the Hot Wax nightclub to burn effigies of their Nemesis Mrs Thatcher, and the Brixton victims can all be identified as voices of unofficial culture.

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[32] Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses,* (London: Vintage, 1998), pp.163-64.

All of the novels I have been discussing portray a Yookay that is very much more divided than it is united, and imagine alternative forms of collective identity. They fictionalise the break-up of the British union or, as Homi Bhabha puts it paraphrasing Rushdie, they imagine 'how newness enters the world.'[33]

This could also be found in such novels as Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (1999) and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), but one final detailed example must suffice here. Kazuo Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans* (2000) is a detailed sophistication on the conventional detective story, which, like *The Volunteers,* poses the investigator as the ultimate mystery and thereby launches much deeper questions of identity. It is centred on a famous detective, Christopher Banks, who had grown up in 1930s Shanghai with a Japanese best friend. Professional success has never enabled him to solve the deepest mystery of his life: the disappearance of his parents when he was a child.

Unlike a conventional detective novel, Ishiguro does not dwell on the crimes which Banks investigates. They are mentioned as it were in passing. The early events of the novel, for example, take place 'barely a month after the conclusion of the Mannering case, and I was still on something of a cloud. Certainly, that period after my first public triumph was a heady one...'[34] Where an entire Sherlock Holmes story or Hercule Poirot novel would be centred on a case like this, in Ishiguro's novel it is incidental to his main plot. 'It was not until my experience of such cases as the Roger Parker murder that it came home to me just how much it means to people – and not only those directly concerned, but the public at large – to be cleansed of such encroaching wickedness.'[35] Ishiguro establishes the credentials of his detective, Christopher Banks, without providing any of the details of the crimes that he has supposedly solved: 'It took me no more than a few days to unravel the mystery of Charles Emery's death.'[36] In this way, as in *The Volunteers,* investigation is posed as initially simple and straightforward – until the investigator runs into a more fundamental problem.

This is what happens to Christopher Banks. Following the disappearance of his parents, he 'returns' from his émigré Japanese friends in Shanghai to an England he has never known. This could be said to have happened to Ishiguro himself, in reverse, for the Japanese-born author seems to have found it deeply problematic to

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[33] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture,* (London: Routledge, 1994), ch.9.
[34] Kazuo Ishiguro, *When We Were Orphans,* (London: Faber, 2000), p.19.
[35] Ishiguro, *When We Were Orphans*, p.30.
[36] Ishiguro, *When We Were Orphans*, p.36.

become identified as an English writer.[37] Ishiguro, like his detective Banks, is continually crossing borders in such a way as to render simplistic notions of belonging untenable.

Having launched his career as a detective vowing to find his parents, Banks finds himself in a conversation with local church minister Canon Moorly, on the gathering clouds of war:

> "What I mean to say, forgive me, is that it's quite natural for some of these gentlemen here tonight to regard Europe as the centre of the present maelstrom. But you, Mr Banks. Of course, *you* know the truth. You know that the real heart of our present crisis lies further afield."
> I looked at him carefully, then said, "I'm sorry, sir. But I'm not quite sure what you're getting at."
> "Oh come, come." He was smiling knowingly. "*You* of all people." (Emphasis in original). [38]

The extent to which this scene echoes an earlier passage from *The Volunteers* is striking. We are forced to ask why Banks in particular should have such a deeper insight into these world affairs, just as we wondered what was hidden in Lewis Redfern's past that made him particularly involved with the Volunteers' work. The conjunction between militarism, imperialism and personal identity becomes more explicit as the conversation continues:

> "You know better than anyone the eye of the storm is to be found not in Europe at all, but in the Far East. In Shanghai, to be exact."
> "Shanghai," I said lamely. " Yes, I suppose... I suppose there are some problems in that city."
> "Problems indeed. And what was once just a local problem has been allowed to fester and grow. To spread its poison over the years, even further across the world, right through our civilisation. But I hardly need remind *you* of this." [39]

Why this emphasis on Banks's own knowledge? Ishiguro in effect posits the investigator as the mystery. Although the credentials of Christopher Banks as a first-class detective have been clearly established, he is unable to provide the answers sought by Canon Moorly. There is a hinted relationship between the disappearance of Christopher's parents and a deepening crisis in the world order. But Christopher

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[37] Barry Lewis notes that Ishiguro suffers 'through comparison with well-known Japanese writers' such as Mishima, Tanizaki and Oe. See his *Kazuo Ishiguro,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.10.
[38] Ishiguro, *When We Were Orphans*, p.137.
[39] Ishiguro, *When We Were Orphans*, p.138.

cannot say what that relationship is. As with *The Volunteers,* the apparently simple structure of the crime genre opens up a space from which further questions can only be asked, not answered. This again elevates the quest for personal identity into a much broader interrogation of an opaque and distant imperial order.

The main shift is away from providing final answers and mastery, and towards an aesthetic of incomplete-ness, where the protagonists themselves are invariably shown to be the real object of the mystery. This forces us to ask: What is identity? What is belonging? It is a technique that was already at work in *The Volunteers,* but without the formal innovation that I am characterising as postmodernist and which only became possible under subsequent historical conditions.

The Satanic Verses and *When We Were Orphans* both resemble *The Volunteers* at a strictly thematic level. Both deploy narrative techniques that I have been describing as postmodern: parody, subversion, irony, and a deep-rooted commitment to questioning different forms of identity politics.[40] The fictional break-up of Britain affords a new opportunity, beyond the entrenched modes of the past, for an active re-imagining of the present.

I have argued that Raymond Williams can be understood as an early postcolonial writer, in the very particular sense that he anticipated the moment of devolution and the political break-up of Britain. His own novels have then to be understood as part of a much more general process of questioning the received unitary identity of Britain, which occurs along all sorts of other coordinates. The general movement of this chapter is therefore away from analysis of the cultural consciousness of *late* modern Britain, and the break-up of its empire. It is a movement towards analysis of *post*-modern Britain, and the break-up of the kingdom.

[40] For a theoretical discussion of these techniques see Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism,* (London: Routledge, 2002) pp.44-59. Is Hutcheon's title a refrain of Raymond Williams's *The Politics of Modernism*?

Chapter Five: Williams, Film and The Break-Up of Britain

In each of the last three chapters, I have presented a pair of related arguments. In Chapter Two, my demonstration of Raymond Williams's involvement in a tradition of Welsh industrial writing was accompanied by a broader theoretical elucidation of Williams's stance on the realist novel form. Then, I showed that Williams's novels were involved in a quite separate, primarily English and middle-class, tradition - of university writing. This was again accompanied by a theoretical evaluation of the centrality of ideas of education to Williams's concept of cultural materialism. Implicitly, involvement in these two traditions reveals Williams to be a constant traverser of disciplinary, generic and national boundaries. This was made more explicitly the case in Chapter Four, where I argued that Williams can be understood as an early postcolonial writer. This involved placing Williams's own fiction in a tradition of post-country house writing that exists in an open dialectical relation to post-imperial history.

In this final chapter too, I shall be making a pair of related arguments. First of all, I want to present Raymond Williams as a film theorist. I will argue that this is the logical end-point of Williams's work on the demise of literature as a discipline as such, and its replacement within the broader pantheon of cultural studies. Moreover, Williams's interest in film is also the logical outcome of his long-term interest in drama.

Williams's theoretical work on drama was the tool by which his literary critical practice opened onto a much wider political world. In Chapters One and Four, I related this strongly to the process of imagining new forms of nationhood. This, I wish to argue, is also the effect of Williams's interest in film. In the second half of this chapter, I shall combine Williams's theoretical interest in film with his political work on British identity, to illuminate a series of filmic responses to the break-up of Britain.

My presentation of Williams as a film theorist will depend quite strongly on the mobilisation of his concept of *flow*. Williams used this term in *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* in 1974, and it has been associated almost exclusively

with his analysis of television ever since.[1] I wish to argue that this key concept in the Williams oeuvre was actually first used in his little-known book, *Preface to Film,* as early as 1954. I will argue that Williams's crucial – and virtually isolated – work of this time was theoretically sophisticated and analytically complex. His work on film and *flow* can be related to the subsequent development of the theory of the *gaze,* and its influence in much later film theory – especially in the academic film journal, *Screen.*

I shall be arguing that not only does Williams enter the field much earlier than subsequent and better-known film theorists, but also that in an important sense he got there before himself. That is, his work on film is not a mere appendage to his work on cultural materialism. Rather, it is actually the place where he worked out in advance some of the central concepts of that work.

Williams, Film and Flow

Raymond Williams opens *Preface to Film* (1954) with a succinct statement of his principles of dramatic criticism. The problem he sets out to address is *how* drama represents what it represents on stage. Or, to put it another way, the question is as to what kind of representation drama can achieve:

> Representation, for example, has strong naturalistic associations, as if the intention of drama were the "lifelike representation" of actions and speech and emotions, by the methods familiar in the naturalist theatre. But clearly it is not, in the simplest sense, lifelike representation when an author writes, and an actor speaks or sings, in verse; nor is formal gesture or movement lifelike in this same sense. Yet such conventions are a major part of our known drama.[2]

'Representation' does not, and cannot, refer to the unproblematic recreation of everyday life on stage. However a piece of drama represents reality, it does not do so by pretending to be real. The word Williams uses for such pretence is 'naturalism' – and he is rather disdainful of it.

The distinction Williams draws in *Preface to Film* is between a dramatic practice that consciously brings the audience to an awareness of their own

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[1] See for example Shaun Moores, 'Television, Geography and Mobile Privatisation.' *European Journal of Communication,* 8(3), 1993, pp.365-79 (p.366) and Stuart Laing, 'Raymond Williams and the Cultural Analysis of Television.' *Media, Culture and Society,* 13(2), 1991, pp.153-67 (p.160).
[2] Williams, *Preface to Film,* (London: Film Drama Limited, 1954), p.7. Cited hereafter as *PF.*

participation in an act of fantasy, and that which obscures its own fictive nature. It is an important distinction, for Williams argues that only the former kind of drama can allow the audience to relate on-stage drama to outside life, thereby gaining from the drama a dynamic self of heightened consciousness in their own world. It is the kind of drama he elsewhere calls *subjunctive,* because it literally allows the audience to imagine their own world – differently.[3]

The whole argument that Williams states in the first half of *Preface to Film* is that drama, from fifth-century Athens onwards, must be understood as the pre-history to film. Film cannot then be understood separately from this history of drama. Williams suggests in *Preface to Film* that with further work, it might become possible to analyse what is historically and culturally specific to different kinds of drama, 'to understand the relation of particular conventions to the life of the time in which they flourished.' (*PF,* p.21). He would later realise this in his own *Drama in Performance* (1968). In a sense, this early work on film can be identified as an important test-ground for the work that would later be identified as cultural materialism.

This point emerges even more strongly as *Preface to Film* turns to the specific technical properties of film itself, in a section co-written with Michael Orrom. In analysing a piece of drama within its cultural/ historical specificity, Williams reaches for an understanding of what he calls 'a total expression' (*PF,* p.31; p.51). This emphasises the integrated nature of filmic performance – combining acting, lighting, sound, dialogue and technical editing. This integrated combination is specific to film, enabling Williams to emphasise the dramatic pre-history on one hand, while examining certain precise properties of film on the other. It shows Williams already reaching forward to the concept of total *flow* that he developed later in the work on drama and television.

This is significant because the section of *Preface to Film* about Pudovkin's film *The Mother* leads directly into a theoretical formulation of film as total *flow*. 'Film expression demands movement and flow. That is its nature.' (*PF,* p.83).[4] *Flow* in this early formulation is not yet an analytic concept; rather it is a technical device employed by the filmmaker himself: 'The basis of the film is movement, so then the

[3] This concept is discussed by Loren Kruger. See her 'Placing the Occasion: Raymond Williams and Performing Culture' in *Views Beyond the Border Country* ed. Dennis Dworkin, (New York: Routledge, 1993), p.56.

[4] I must acknowledge here that this discussion appears in the chapter of *Preface to Film* attributed to Williams's co-author, Michael Orrom. It bears such striking resemblance to the later work of Williams, however, that I cannot believe that Williams had no input at this stage.

basis of the linkage must be movement, smooth movement, *flow*.' (Ibid, emphasis in original). As a technical practice, *flow* primarily consists of editing sequences smoothly together into a melodic whole. The musical metaphor is appropriate because Williams and Orrom argue that if the smooth sequences produced by filmic flow are to be compared to any other art, then it should be to music:

> In the method of music will be found the clue to the new method which must be used in film. To get "flow", the new concept is introduced from within the expression of the old; it begins as a small part of the first and gradually eclipses it. But the new is presented from a reference point within the old. This is precisely the method which must be used in film to avoid the disturbing jerks of normal cutting. The new character, the new concept, must be introduced through a development in the existing image. By that means we get not only a complete and convincing sense of location, we also get a smooth and satisfying transition. (*PF*, p.84).

In a musical symphony, one theme gives way to another during a smooth and gradual transition. The varying themes flow over each other, so that it is not easy to identify the precise moment at which one is replaced with another. This is how Williams and Orrom try to relate the concept of *flow* to film. Each scene, each section, must blend with those preceding and succeeding it, to create an integrated whole. At this first stage of Williams's development of the concept, *flow* is defined as a technical device aimed at cutting or editing the filmed sections into a smooth symphonic whole.

This early sense of the concept of *flow* exerted a deep influence over Williams's thinking for much of the early part of his career. It is ironic that in his 1968 study, *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*, Williams continued to use *flow* in this sense – the careful editing out of jerky disturbances to create a harmonious whole. This is despite the fact that *flow* so conceived appears to militate against the epic theatre for which Williams praised Brecht – which depends on the continual suspension of smooth naturalistic representation, and its replacement with a series of uneasy juxtapositions which provide an oblique commentary on the dramatic action.[5]

The second stage in the development of the concept of *flow*, as developed in the 1968 book, is very much akin to the 1954 version. *Flow* remains a technical method employed by the *dramatist* to create smooth (naturalistic) drama. It has not yet been developed as an analytic concept to be used by the analyst. For example,

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[5] On Williams and Brecht see Bernard Sharrat, 'In Whose Voice? The Drama of Raymond Williams' in *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives* ed. Terry Eagleton (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), pp.130-49.

Williams used this version of *flow* in 1968 to describe the dramatic method of Strindberg:

> If the scenic imagery is taken within the read work, the whole becomes a drama of rich and controlled complexity. But of course that was the problem: the practical integration of word and scene. What was available in the theatre was their *association,* but this is very different. It was the true sequence, the *flow* in one medium of scene and word, which Strindberg wanted and imagined, but which... he could not then get. Once again, he was writing well ahead of his time, imagining a single word-and-scene medium – in effect the patterned control of film – which did not yet exist. (*DIB,* p.93, emphasis added).

Williams suggests that Strindberg's drama anticipated technical developments in television and film. It is interesting then that Williams's *study* of Strindberg's drama anticipated his own later study of television. That is why Williams uses the same term, *flow,* in each case.

This emphasis on avoiding 'disturbing jerks' in the editing would not remain the main point of Williams's interest in *flow* throughout his work. Indeed, *flow* would come to seem rather pernicious. For in editing out the jerky breaks in the continuous motion of the drama, it militates against the oblique commentary that is such a vital feature of epic political theatre, which depends on the continual interruption of the drama as naturalistic representation.[6]

In 1968, Williams was still using *total flow* to refer to a method of combining the different elements that make up dramatic form. Thereafter, an important complication of the original concept of *flow* came into his thinking. This development saw Williams cease to use *flow* as a technical method employed by the dramatist/ filmmaker, and mobilise it instead as an *analytic* concept employed by the critic or analyst.

The third stage in the genesis of *flow* as an analytic concept was signalled in *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* in 1974. By now, Williams has become less uncritically enthusiastic for the makers of film and television drama. He has become more aware of the need to adopt a stance of scepticism towards these things. Accordingly, he ceases to use *flow* as a term for registering his approval for the

[6] Lizzie Eldridge explores Williams's ideas of how theatre can contribute to political consciousness in her 'Drama in a Dramaturgical Society' in *Raymond Williams Now: Knowledge, Limits and the Future* ed. Jeff Wallace, Rod Jones and Sophie Nield, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), pp.71-88.

process of filmmaking. Instead, he begins to use it as a rather pejorative term, capable of directing attention towards the more insidious effects of film and television.

The contribution to television studies for which Williams has become rightly known was in this area of *flow*. He uses the term to describe the deliberate planned sequences in which television programmes – and advertisements and intermissions – are broadcast. He was one of the first theorists to realise that television could not be adequately understood through the analysis of individual programmes. Since these are broadcast in an orchestrated sequence, it is as a sequence that they must be considered.

Williams announces this important methodological breakthrough when he writes, 'there has been a significant shift from the concept of sequence as *programming* to the concept of sequence as *flow*. Yet this is difficult to see because the older concept of programming – the temporal sequence within which mix and proportion and balance operate – is still active and still to some extent real.'[7] The shift Williams achieved in television studies was from an analytic practice of considering individual programmes in isolation, to considering the programmes and advertisements alongside each other, as a continual sequence. This is his third definition of *flow*.

There are important differences between the precise properties of film and of television. Williams tends to yoke these together, as in his later enthusiastic review of Jim Allen's television film, *The Big Flame*.[8] The advantage of these conflations is that it enables us to consider the concept of *flow* as Williams developed it in *Television* in 1974 as part of his ongoing elaboration of a Marxist theory of culture. This incorporated an analytic interest in both film and television, as can be gauged by the fact that it was in the early work on film that the later concept for televisual study had been worked out.

By this third stage, then, the concept of *flow* has a much more complex meaning than that which was used in the earlier work on film and drama. Yet we can see retrospectively that it was in that work that Williams was beginning to develop the concept itself. When looked at in this light, the interest in film is not simply an interesting add-on to Williams's practice of cultural materialism. It is a positively

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[7] Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, (London: Routledge, 2003, first published 1974), p.89. Cited hereafter as *T*.
[8] See his 'A Defence of Realism' in *WCS*, pp.226-239.

central component of it. If we then apply the later, more sophisticated version of *flow* retroactively to the areas of film and drama in which it was first developed in a simple way, what would be the result? It would provide us with an analytically sophisticated tool for the analysis *both* of television *and* of film.

Williams wrote the following words explicitly about the experience of watching television. I wish to argue that they can also be applied to film:

> The flow offered can also, and perhaps more fundamentally, be related to the television experience itself. Two common observations bear on this. As has already been noted, most of us say, in describing the experience, 'watching television', rather than that we have watched 'the news' or 'a play' or 'the football' *on television*... Then again, it is a widely if often ruefully admitted experience that many of us find television very difficult to switch off; that again and again, even when we have switched on for a particular 'programme', we find ourselves watching the one after it and the one after that. The way in which flow is now organized, without definite intervals, in any case encourages this. (*T*, p.94, emphasis in original).

The laudatory concept of *flow* as being the technical means of ironing out annoying jerky interruptions has now been replaced by this idea of *flow* as something much more insidious. Flow defined in this way is not so much what we look at. Rather it is what looks *at* us. The flow, in other words, is located outside the viewer. It has power over the viewer, whom it can 'capture' (*T*, p.91) for a period of time. This period of time itself is referred to technically as 'an evening's viewing' (*T*, p.93). Yet again, this term, *viewing* is not used to refer to the act carried out by the viewer. It refers to what is viewed. As such it is a kind of mystification. It is enabled by the medium of the external flow, located outside the individual viewer's control. *Viewing* then refers not to the act of watching television, but to the act of being confronted by televisual flow. The flow, that is, reaches out to us, rather than we to it.

The version of *flow* that has emerged from this third stage of Williams's career has the potential to be mobilised in film study. The reason for this is that this definition of *flow* has much in common with the Lacanian concept of the *gaze* that was by this stage beginning to be developed in film studies – particularly in the journal, *Screen*. This brings us to a stage where Raymond Williams can be presented as a complex film theorist in his own right. His work then converges with the much broader *Screen* school of analysis in fruitful and important ways.

Screen Theory

Jacques Lacan understood the *gaze* as an analytic concept rather than any physically accessible piece of sensory equipment. This strikingly parallels Raymond Williams's distinction between *flow* and act of seeing. Lacan states this distinction concisely: 'The world is all-seeing, but it is not exhibitionistic – it does not provoke our gaze.'[9] It is not the eye that commands the gaze. Rather, the gaze is located in the object beheld by the eye.

To Lacan, this theoretical insight bears on the process of subjectivity formation. A united sense of self has to be performed in order to exist. This is enabled by the gaze which, by virtue of being located outside the self, enables the subject to imagine its own unified identity. The gaze is a way of imagining the self looking at itself from a point outside it. As Lacan puts it, 'the gaze "I" see is a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other.'[10]

The externally located gaze is redefined in film study as the *fourth look.* [11] It comes after the three cinematic looks of audience to screen; character to character; and actor to camera. The fourth look is then the illusion of being caught in the act of looking at others looking at others looking at others. It is again only an illusion, a concept, rather than any physical act of looking that takes place. It bears deeply on Lacan's notion of the means by which the gaze enables subjectivity formation by overcoming the divisions within the restlessly searching ego, and by presenting a unified self for presentation in the imaginary fourth look. As Lacan puts it, the gaze enables the individual subject to acquire a full subjectivity by providing the illusion of 'seeing oneself see oneself.'[12]

A landmark moment in the history of film studies was the publication in *Screen* in 1975 of Laura Mulvey's paper, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.' Emerging out of the Women's Movement, Mulvey employed the Lacanian notion of the *gaze* to critique what she saw as the tendency in mainstream cinema to pose women as fetish objects. She proposed the three cinematic looks of viewer to screen; character to character; and actor to camera. Yet she noted that the mystique of the

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[9] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* trans. Alan Sheridan, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p.75.
[10] Ibid, p.84.
[11] I have taken this term from Paul Willemen. See his 'Letter to John' in *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality* ed. John Caughie and Annette Kuhn, (London: Routledge, 1992), p.174.
[12] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p.83.

cinema serves to conceal the first and third, thus naturalising the presented relationship between characters. This in turn naturalised a scenario where women were fixed as passive objects of male desire. Their only role in film was to provide the fantasy of sexual pleasure for the actively desiring male viewer.

Mulvey's analysis depends strongly on a notion of *scopophilia*, or the sexual gaze. Mulvey suggests that the conditions of cinema itself support this. We sit in darkness, so we see, but are not seen. The exhibitionism of the viewer – the desire to be looked at - is repressed, and projected onto the performer. This gives rise to a second level of visual pleasure, which Mulvey calls *identification* with the main actor. Drawing on Lacan's concept of the gaze, she suggests that in the cinema, the process of identification depends on an interplay between recognition and mis-recognition. The filmic gaze depends on likeness and difference: 'the glamorous [star] impersonates the ordinary [viewer].'[13]

As with Lacan's work on gaze and Raymond Williams's idea of flow, this suggests a contradiction in the gaze. Film is *diegetic*: it uses both spectacle and narrative. When the action is moving on, we 'look' through identification with the main male characters. However, Mulvey argues that the woman as object suspends this. When we look at a woman in a film, the narrative is frozen. We look just at a woman, not at part of narrative. If the woman becomes active as part of the narrative, rather than existing simply as an object, this level of satisfaction is denied. This tendency of women to enter the narrative gives rise to a castration fantasy – a fear of womanly power. The two dominant filmic solutions to this are punishment/ containment of the woman; or transfer of anxiety to a fetish object so that the source of anxiety loses its threat. Mulvey gives Sternberg's film *Morocco* as an example of a film which is emplotted in such a way as to *contain* the possibility of female power by restoring women to the status of objects. She cites another Sternberg film, *Dishonoured* as an example of the latter strategy – where anxiety is transferred from woman to fetish object. Mulvey concludes:

> In *reality* the phantasy world of the screen is subject to the law which produces it. Sexual instincts and identification processes have a meaning within the symbolic order which articulates desire. Desire, born with language, allows the possibility of transcending the instinctual and the imaginary, but its point of reference continually returns to the traumatic moment of its birth: the castration complex. Hence the look, pleasurable in its form, can be

[13] Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality* ed. John Caughie and Annette Kuhn, (London: Routledge, 1992), p.26.

> threatening in its content, and it is woman as representation/ image that crystallizes this paradox.[14]

The gaze poses women as fetish objects for the satisfaction of the male viewer. If women on screen are allowed to move and form part of the narrative, this satisfaction is short-circuited. This cannot be allowed and so womanly power is eliminated by the returning of female bodies to stasis. It must be noted that this perhaps simple binary opposition between active male/ passive female has drawn considerable critique since the article was published in 1975.[15]

The significant conclusion that Mulvey proposes is the theoretical relation between *gaze* and *phantasy,* or symbolic enactment of wish-fulfilment. Phantasy itself is arguably the process by which the gaze orchestrates unconscious desire for a stable ego and so provides ideological resolution. Particularly intriguing in this regard is an implicit distinction Raymond Williams had made twenty-one years earlier, in *Preface to Film,* between *phantasy* and *fantasy* in film:

> It is an immensely powerful medium, and in the darkened auditorium the dominating scene, with its very large, moving figures, its very loud sound, its simultaneous appeal to eye and ear can, it seems obvious, exercise a kind of "hypnotic" effect which very readily promotes phantasy and easy emotional indulgence. (*PF,* p.13).

This seems to be the lure of the filmic gaze at work. The emphasis is on the organized and projected orchestration on film of unconscious desires within the subject. Clearly, the ways in which cinematic gaze organizes unconscious phantasy in this way has important implications for the construction of dominant versions of society.

Later in *Preface to Film,* Williams refers to *fantasy* (with an 'f') as an example of a more conscious generic mode, rather than the specific mobilisation of unconscious desire carried out by the makers of one particular film. Addressing the concept of naturalism in the cinema, he writes:

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[14] Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' p.26.

[15] Articles in *Screen* to dispute this binary reading include Mary Ann Doane, 'Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator' and Steve Neale, 'Masculinity as Spectacle', both in *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality* ed. John Caughie and Annette Kuhn, (London: Routledge, 1992). Doane's article, first published in *Screen* in 1982 attempts to theorise a position where the female viewer is more empowered than Mulvey's analysis suggested. Neale's article, of 1980, questions the assumption that only female bodies are used as fetish objects.

> we find it applied indiscriminately, in new plays, to orthodox religious drama, to melodramas of an essentially nineteenth-century type, to *fantasies,* and even... to farce. (*PF,* p.39, emphasis added).

Implicit in Williams's critique of naturalism is something quite different from unconscious *phantasy.* The tendency of naturalism as Williams saw it was to simply reproduce 'real life' on the screen. This fails to draw attention to the fact that any film is not reality, it is only representation. It is not self-conscious, and in Williams's sense is thus undramatic. This point bears on the distinction between *phantasy* and *fantasy.*

Implicit in the critique of naturalism is an idea that it supports a static and unchanging worldview, supported by the mobilisation in film drama of unconscious phantastic desires which support that view. A cinematic gaze which appropriates women as objects of possession implicitly supports a worldview where this is also the case, by harnessing an unconscious phantasy of male domination over women.

The separate use Williams makes of the term *fantasy* suggests that not all desire is unconscious. Implicitly then if *fantasy* is a conscious phenomenon, it is harder for the filmic gaze to manipulate. The ability of the analyst to *disbelieve* or *contest* the film's reality becomes as a result much stronger.

This point is only implicit in Williams. He does not clearly define what he means by the different terms *phantasy* and *fantasy.* However, that a writer so scrupulously careful in verbal precision should employ such a distinction at all implies an important conceptual difference. To tease this difference out, I wish to look at another article published in *Screen,* almost thirty years later, by Lesley Stern.

In 'The Body as Evidence', published in 1982, Stern draws attention to a need for conceptual clarity in the different ways in which the terms *phantasy* and *fantasy* are used:

> The understanding of 'phantasy' used in this theoretical work is fairly broad, and indeed capitalizes on a lack of clarity in Freud's own work. Freud uses the term in three ways: first to denote conscious imaginings or daydreams (in less specialized writings this is often spelt 'fantasy'); second, to denote unconscious phantasies which have a similar structure to dreams in that their origin lies in repressed material – analysis of the manifest content should reveal the way in which the prohibition is present in the actual formation of the wish that motivates dream or the phantasy and third to denote primal phantasies, fundamental unconscious structures which transcend individual experience.[16]

[16] Lesley Stern, 'The Body as Evidence' in *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality* ed. John Caughie and Annette Kuhn, (London: Routledge, 1992), p.213.

Stern refers to the need for conceptual clarity between the different uses of the term, *phantasy*. It is this need for clarity which drives her towards the distinction between *phantasy* and *fantasy* which had been implicitly made by Williams in *Preface to Film*. Moreover, Stern's insight here recalls Williams's critique of dramatic naturalism. Williams had argued that in simply recreating everyday life on stage or on camera, naturalism in effect ratified a static series of relations outside the theatre. In other words, mainstream naturalist film drama is deeply conservative, for it leaves no room for effective critique of the social order. This is also the effect of films which privilege realist narrative and its logical progress towards wish-fulfilment and closure.

In the second half of this chapter, I shall show that this kind of film is being produced by mainstream filmmakers in Britain even today. I shall demonstrate that a series of films featuring Hugh Grant's charming English buffoon character promotes a phantasy geared towards securing the unity of the ego of the viewing subject. This unity of the viewing subject is then worked up onto collective lines, in order to offer a second phantasy of a unified national identity. I shall call this a *compensatory phantasy,* for it aims at securing a stable unified collective ego, a national ego we might say, during a historical period when the unity of the United Kingdom has been very much more in doubt than at an earlier period. The potential of film to create a collective ego in this way bears strongly on Benedict Anderson's notion of the imagined community. It is notable that according to Lacan, the gaze which enables films to carry out this kind of work, is *imagined* by the subject in the field of the Other, just as to Anderson, the national community itself is imagined into being.

Lesley Stern advocates a viewing strategy that resists such closure, by viewing the film against the grain. This generates a degree of conscious agency for the viewing subject, who is thereby able to resist acquiescence in the imagined order of the filmic gaze. This is the point Stern tries to draw out of the phantasy/ fantasy distinction thirty years after Williams:

> At a certain level it seems useful to make a distinction between, on the one hand, *fantasy* as conscious imaginings, daydreams, inventions, make-believe, reverie; and on the other hand, the various other senses in which *phantasy* is used. This is not to make a strict demarcation between the conscious on one hand and the unconscious on the other, for clearly daydreams can tell us about the unconscious and are indeed structured by psychic mechanisms. However, the functioning of different kinds of phantasy needs to be distinguished. [17]

[17] Stern, 'The Body as Evidence,' p.214.

Stern renders explicit what had been latent in Williams's *Preface to Film*. In cinema, *fantasy* is taken to be congruent with conscious desire. It is not defined as an unconscious process of identity formation, and this unconscious process is what Stern calls *phantasy*. Fantasy as conscious desire can be used to interrupt the organization of unconscious wish-fulfilment and hence throw the tendency of the filmic gaze to posit a stable subject into sharp relief. Stern continues:

> Realism and narrative have been privileged sites for the return of the repressed, and breaks with them have been advocated as ways of fracturing the false unity of the viewing subject, provoking a more self-conscious and active subject. What has been glaringly absent from much of this discourse is a conceptualisation of fiction. Fiction is most often collapsed into narrative or seen as shaped by and subordinate to realism: even when we know that we are watching something unreal we are structured into 'belief' through the strategies of realism. But it might be important to explore the way in which *disbelief* operates in film viewing.[18]

Stern's emphasis on the fictional nature of conscious fantasy takes us all the way back to Williams's early concept of *convention*. In films and drama where the dramatic conventions are functioning successfully, the viewer is not asked to collude in an affirmation of some mystified sense of exterior reality. Rather, he or she is asked to consciously participate in an act of make-believe that opens onto the exterior world in such a way as to throw that construct into question.

Film History and National Tradition

Raymond Williams's first strategy for doing this was to reject entirely the idea of a single unified object - 'film'. This rejection was based on terms that recall his contemporary rejection of 'literature' in favour of the more open-ended 'writing.' The rejection of 'film' as a category does not imply rejection of the study of actual filmic products. Rather it represents Williams clearing the ground of any pre-conceived notion of what we might mean by 'film'. Just as a pre-conceived notion of the *literary* disqualified in advance interesting forms of writing such as diaries, letters and

[18] Ibid.

journalism, in favour of the supposedly literary forms of the novel and poetry, so too a reified notion of film excludes certain forms such as drama adaptation, documentary or reportage, again in favour of certain imaginative forms, as if these and these alone are worthy of attention. Williams explored these conceptual issues in his paper, 'Film History', in 1983:

> To write a critical history of 'film' which is actually going to exclude, on such grounds, those films which were really only 'theatrical or literary bastards' is a procedure so astonishing that it could only ever be undertaken in the same spirit of misplaced confidence that is shown in similar histories of Literature (excluding not only all 'non-imaginative' writing, but also most actual novels and poems which fall below the proper standard of 'literature') or Theatre (restricting drama to one of its places of performance – the theatre – and to work of certain types, while excluding other places of performance and rejecting all other types as 'popular entertainment'). What we really find, in each case, is a categorical argument, based on what, if it were not categorical, could be openly offered as a justified opinion, which manages to reduce the actual diversity of its real subject and to offer its highly selective version as the whole real history of its now necessarily hard-line area.[19]

Williams's approach takes the form of a negation of a negation. He rejects the dominant institutional rejection of some kinds of writing as non-literary. He rejects too the dominant rejection of some kinds of film as not worthy of study. By rejecting this unitary object, 'film', Williams opens up the discipline to more precise analysis. Rather than a single category, 'film', we are then in a position to pay attention to different kinds of production in different scenarios. Like the shift from 'Literature' into 'Writing', we might say that the death of 'Film' gives rise to the birth of 'film.'

This leads Williams onto an important second rejection. Associated with a pre-conceived notion of the literary is a historical tradition of literary idealism: viewing the literary text as if it were entirely separate from daily life. When Williams rejects one tendency, he also attacks the other. This is again his approach to film just as much as to literature:

> temporary and provisional indications of attention and emphasis – of 'subjects' – can never be mistaken for independent and isolated processes and products. For they are at best provisional intellectual identifications of significant areas of a common life. At worst, and frequently, they draw hard lines around certain areas, cutting off the practical relations with other 'areas' (which are indeed then seen only as 'areas' – 'the economy', 'the family', 'literature') which are in fact necessary if we are to understand the 'outward' relations – how 'the economy' affected 'the cinema' – but also the 'internal' relations and compositions, the supposed fixed properties of 'cinema' or 'film' which can often be clarified if the specific processes are seen in the context of much more general processes. ('Film History,' p.133).

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[19] Williams, 'Film History' in *WCS*, p.134. Cited hereafter as 'Film History.'

The 'temporary and provisional indications of attention and emphasis' Williams mentions here is a reference to the dominant habit of dividing all areas of life and work up into separate areas or specialisations. Because he knows this autonomy of spheres to be an illusion, Williams rejects the idea of film as a discrete field of study that cannot be related to other fields – like drama, or economics. Implicitly, he advocates a practice of analysing film production as it occurs in its historic and institutional milieu. As a result, he cannot see film as an idealist realm. On the contrary, it is thoroughly materialist, deeply involved in much wider social, cultural, political and economic formations which have themselves to be factored into our understanding of the films.

Williams calls for a methodological self-consciousness, whereby the analyst will not mystify the item under scrutiny as an example of a timeless generalised category, 'Film.' Critical self-consciousness will enable the analyst to realise that these classifications are themselves highly provisional, amenable to much discussion and change. 'Lines have indeed to be drawn, to make any account possible, but it is always necessary to see ourselves as drawing them, and willing to redraw them rather than to suppose that the marks on this one of many maps are hard features, of similar content and isolation, on the ground.' ('Film History,' p.133).

Williams wants to transcend disciplinary maps. This is a suggestive metaphor, for it opens onto the *national* context. It is not surprising that in film as in literature, Raymond Williams makes a third crucial rejection, that of the idea of national tradition. He notes in the essay 'Film History' that at a comparatively early stage in the development of cinema, certain films began to be assimilated to a putative national tradition – which then also excluded certain other films. This of course was happening not only in film, but also in literature, in history, and in all sorts of other areas. Thus Williams writes, 'national traditions are identified within the more general phases: a form of history which can then be developed into a form of criticism.' ('Film History,' p.132). As with literature, films which could be made to cohere to an externally constructed sense of what the nation stood for were accepted into the tradition. Films which did not so cohere were overlooked. What Williams never manages to pinpoint is *which* nation is being referred to. The implication is that he is

discussing a unitary *British* film history. But there were always different traditions in Scotland and Wales, as we shall see.

Williams's response to the metropolitan history of film is ambiguous. On one hand, he thinks the metropolitan preference which emerged relatively early in the history of cinema was no more than an ideology, which flatly contradicted the reality. I showed in Chapter One that the drama for which Williams was most enthusiastic was that of the emerging nations of Scandinavia and Ireland. Moreover, earlier in this chapter we saw that Williams understood that drama was the pre-history of film. In other words, the pre-emergent stage of important radical cinema was not located in the metropolitan centres of London or Paris at all. Williams's positive evaluation of the work of Synge, O'Casey, Ibsen and Strindberg leaps from every page of *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* and *Drama in Performance*. The most important work in early film, and what we might call 'late pre-film drama', was being carried out in these newly self-conscious and distinctly subordinate nations.[20] Thus the metropolitan bias was 'inherently false.' ('Film History,' p.141).

On the other hand, Williams points out that historically, there followed a kind of 'parasitism' ('Film History,' p.141) where new kinds of centralisation took place according to where films were being made – and where money was available to fund them. It was this centralisation which gave rise to the idea of a national tradition, centred on the fashionable London studios of Ealing and Pinewood. It had the effect of making seem natural what was really a historically produced phenomenon: the concentration of authority in a few metropolitan centres. Williams can see how this situation might seem natural, but warns us off such an approach: 'Within capitalist and state-capitalist economies, it came to seem natural that this led, by a familiar financial logic, to an extreme concentration and relative monopoly of production: massive production costs made more affordable by a controlled system of mass distribution.' ('Film History,' p.144).[21]

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[20] We could also add Australia to the list. Andrew Milner points out that the first feature length film ever made was Australian, *The Story of the Kelly Gang.* See his *Literature, Culture and Society,* (London: UCL Press, 1996), p.75.

[21] Williams's point about the origin of film in drama emerges strongly here. Just as cinema is overwhelmingly identified with near-monopoly ownership, so too was this true of theatres at an earlier stage. Robert Hewison notes that in 1947, twenty-one out of thirty West End theatres were owned by the 'Group' theatre of H.M. Tennent and Hugh Beaumont. See Hewison, *In Anger: Culture in the Cold War,* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981), p.9.

If we rid ourselves of the idea of a single object, 'film', and realise that it cannot easily be assimilated to a national tradition, then what do we find? There is in film as much as in literature a variety of practice occurring in specific materially situated institutions at specific historic moments. To gain a sense of this variety is to refuse the naturalising ideology that equates film production with the inevitable dominance of a few centres of production: 'the material factor itself could, within different general relations, lead as easily to more diverse centres of production, beyond the old metropolitan fixed points, and to a radically extended and more diverse distribution of this wider range.' ('Film History,' pp.144-45).

Williams knows that cinematic production remains overwhelmingly metropolitan in form and that it mystifies critical consciousness as a result. He knows too that attempts to resist this have been brave, but have rarely succeeded for long. 'The tendencies to monopoly, to incorporation and to agency or outpost production in terms of the dominant centre have been so strong that only relatively brief periods of fully independent production, and then more often than not in "national" terms, have escaped them.' ('Film History,' p.145).

This at last hints at a problem Williams had earlier failed to address: namely, in discussing the national tradition, *which* nation does he mean? By referring briefly here to independent cinematic production which is nevertheless carried out in 'national terms', Williams is surely referring to alternative national traditions in Scotland and Wales. We might think of the 1940 Paul Robeson film, *Proud Valley*, which portrays the lives and aspirations of the Welsh working class in a way quite unlike anything produced within the Ealing-Pinewood tradition, as an example of this. It is perhaps no coincidence that when London's National Film Theatre held a screening of films selected in tribute to Williams shortly after his death in 1988, Dai Smith chose Karl Francis's Welsh mining film, *Miss Rhymney Valley 1985*, as an appropriate tribute.[22] Williams himself wrote with great enthusiasm in the journal *Screen* on the film *The Big Flame,* written by Jim Allen and directed by Scottish socialist documentary filmmaker Ken Loach.

In other words, there have always been independent centres of production which the metropolitan mainstream tends to overlook. Although, as Williams points

[22] Smith writes about his reasons for this selection in the volume printed to accompany the screenings, *Raymond Williams: Film, TV, Culture* ed. David Lusted, (London: British Film Institute, 1989), pp.35-41.

out, these outposts have normally taken the form of alternative nationalisms in Scotland and Wales, this is not necessarily the case. *The Big Flame* was set in the Liverpool docks which Jim Allen understood more immediately than he would have done Scotland and Wales. The film is as fully committed to resisting the metropolitan bias as anything produced in Scotland or Wales.

This points to a problem I explored in Chapter Four: that it is apparently easier for artists in Scotland and Wales to pit national difference against the conflated English/ British mainstream than it is for English artists who nevertheless are not represented by metropolitan forms. What we have to remember then, is Williams's assertion that the national difference can be an emotional obstacle, and that writers like Allen, free from such a burden, should be able to get through to the real problems more – rather than less – easily than in Scotland and Wales. Accordingly Williams concludes his essay on 'Film History' by averring that 'it has been almost wholly in these comparatively independent centres that work of real value has been done.' ('Film History,' p.145). It is a note of cautious optimism. He asserts that work from the periphery rather than the centre has been really valuable. He then concludes with the telling words 'break up': 'the old economy of the cinema is beginning to break up' and this will allow the unitary history of the national tradition to be 'reinterpreted by being changed.' ('Film History,' p.146).

Hugh Grant's English Buffoon

I have chosen to explore these issues in relation to a series of inter-related films featuring Hugh Grant's popular persona as a man-for-all-seasons buffoonish Englishman. The films *Love Actually* (2003), *Notting Hill* (1999) and *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994) were not explicitly created as part of a series. Yet there are sufficient thematic similarities between them for me to usefully consider them in relation to each other. These similarities, coupled with the ubiquitous figure of Hugh Grant's middle English buffoon, bring the films into an interesting relation with each other in a way that allows me to propose a final extension of Williams's concept of *flow*.

Richard Curtis's 2003 film, *Love Actually*, opens with a frame narrative spoken by actor Hugh Grant. This frame narrative sets the scene for the film. It occurs

before the title music and therefore also before the dramatic action proper has got under way. In other words, Hugh Grant at this stage has not been ascribed to any particular character. He is a disembodied voice: the accumulation of all of his previous film roles speaking simultaneously.

> Whenever I get gloomy with the state of the world, I think about the arrivals gate at Heathrow airport. General opinion is starting to make out that we live in a world of hatred and greed, but I don't see that. It seems to me that love is everywhere.[23]

The frame narrative is simple. Grant tells us that love is more prevalent in daily life than is popularly acknowledged in a media society where the news is always terrible.[24] This simple message is also couched in a precise social and historical context. The Hugh Grant figure goes on:

> When the planes hit the twin towers, as far as I know, none of the phone calls from the people on board were messages of hate or revenge. They were all messages of love. If you look for it, I've got a sneaking feeling you'll find that love actually is all around.[25]

The historical reference to the attacks in New York in 2001 appears to date the film in the immediate aftermath of that event – an aftermath characterised by American militarism. In other words, the film is located in a historical period in which British military power and global importance had diminished, relative to the new militarism of the United States of America. This is the situation which this feel-good film aims to redress. It sets out to provide a compensatory phantasy, where the relegation of Britain to junior partner in a larger military alliance can be symbolically conjured away, and where a strong sense of British unity can be perpetuated.

The quested-for unified national ego opens directly onto larger questions of global power and politics, and these issues are crystallized in the figure of Hugh Grant, whose character, we soon discover, is newly elected Prime Minister. The frame narrative's reference to the 'twin towers' anticipates a later scene, where the new Prime Minister holds his first cabinet meeting. He is warned by a colleague that there is a strong feeling in the country that the previous government had failed to stand up to brash American power in global affairs, and that the new government should take a

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[23] Richard Curtis (director), *Love Actually,* (2003), scene 1.
[24] Raymond Williams explores the relation of *bad news* to consumer society in his 'Isn't the News Terrible?' in *WCS.* See especially p.115.
[25] *Love Actually,* scene 1.

more positive role in doing so. It is the vacuum created by this relative loss of power on the world stage that *Love Actually* aims to redress:

> Prime Minister: Okay, what's next?
> Colleague: The President's visit.
> Prime Minister: Ah yes, yes. I fear this is going to be a difficult one to play. Alex?
> Alex: There's a very strong feeling in the party, we mustn't allow ourselves to be bullied from pillar to post like the last government.
> All: Here, here.[26]

The historical context which was generated by the 'twin towers' reference suggests that the 'last government' referred to here is Tony Blair's administration of the turn of the century. It was the same government who in 1997 had let the cat out of the devolution bag, granting some measure of self-rule to Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and therefore placing the unity of the ego-collective in jeopardy. The film relates the two phenomena, loss of global power and loss of unified sense of self, to each other.

We know from Lacan that a united ego is imagined by the subject in the field of the Other. It has to be performed in front of the Other in order to exist. For the ego-collective too, unity can only be imagined in the field of the Other through its essentially performative nature. This performance is the work undertaken by the film. As Lesley Stern says, the filmic text is 'working towards wish fulfilment by providing satisfaction, a happy ending; but also... working towards unification, securing identity and resolution, both of the film and of the viewing subject.'[27]

Love Actually makes an attempt to manipulate unconscious phantasy - as theorised by Williams and Stern. Stern's comment implies that this takes place in two ways: offering to provide *satisfaction* and *unification.* In other words, it offers to provide resolution to the ego of the viewing subject (individual), and to work this up into a collective social closure provided by the film to its *collective* audience.

Love Actually asserts a spurious version of a unified British ego-collective. This is encapsulated in the contest Hugh Grant's Prime Minister enters into with the visiting American President to win the affection of a working-class girl, Natalie. The Prime Minister initially tells his cabinet colleagues that he has no intention of acting

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[26] *Love Actually,* scene 4.
[27] Stern, 'The Body as Evidence,' p.214.

'like a petulant child' when he welcomes the leader of 'the most powerful country in the world.'[28] It is only when the Prime Minister interrupts the President stealing a kiss from Natalie that he appears to harden in his attitude towards the President.

The Cabinet meeting scene is interrupted by Natalie's arrival with a tea tray. She does not speak or act, she merely brings in the tray and stands in the hallway of the meeting room.[29] Laura Mulvey's argument about the male identity of the filmic gaze is that women in film do not act. Rather they suspend narrative and become objects of the scopophilic gaze. Female action represents a tangible threat to the ideological closure which the narrative itself is working towards. This threat must be contained by the flow of the film – hence the suspension of the narrative when Natalie is on camera. *Love Actually* offers to provide a new ego-collective for Britain. To threaten narrative closure is to threaten that unified identity, and the film cannot allow this. Accordingly, Natalie is converted into a fetish object, where the threat posed by her suspension of the narrative can be overcome by posing her as the object of the narrative itself.

The film cuts to the scene of a press conference at the end of the President's visit. The President informs reporters that he has had a very satisfactory visit, and that the 'special relationship' between the two countries remains strong and close.[30] Keeping in mind the Prime Minister's chagrin over the President's advances towards Natalie, the word 'relationship' also operates in another dimension here, that of the personal-romantic. The Prime Minister tells reporters:

> I love that word, relationship. Covers all manner of sins, doesn't it? I fear that this has become a bad relationship. A relationship based on the President taking exactly what he wants and casually ignoring all those things that really matter to Britain.
> We may be a small country, but we are a great one too. The country of Shakespeare. Churchill. The Beatles. Sean Connery. Harry Potter. David Beckham's right foot. David Beckham's left foot, come to that.
> A friend who bullies us is no longer a friend. And since bullies only respond to strength, from now onward, I will be prepared to be much stronger, and the President should be prepared for that. [31]

It is romantic envy over the President's perceived relationship with Natalie that prompts the Prime Minister to revoke the 'special relationship' between the

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[28] *Love Actually,* scene 4.
[29] See Figure One.
[30] *Love Actually,* scene 7.
[31] Ibid.

countries, reverse his earlier policy, and strengthen Britain's position with regard to America. In other words, the film uses the figure of the woman, Natalie, to allegorise a mythical restitution of British power. The film thus modulates between provision of finished subjectivity within the individual viewer, and ideological closure of the collective viewing community. As Benedict Anderson puts it at the conclusion of *Imagined Comunities*, 'as with modern persons, so it is with nations.'[32]

The main scenes of the film are inter-cut with scenes from around the country, where people are following the fortunes of the Prime Minister. The film invites viewers to cultivate a sense of simultaneous communion in the same viewing experience, through reference to the same signifiers, which thereby have the effect of reasserting the unity of the United Kingdom. As Raymond Williams had earlier put it, 'the sense of friends and neighbours is attached to a distant and commanding organization: in Britain, now, that which ought to be spelled as it so barbarously sounds – the United Kingdom, the "Yookay"... The powerful feelings of wanting to belong to a society are then in a majority of cases bonded to these large definitions.' (*T2000,* p.182).

It is notable that none of the scenes from around the nation are in any way place-specific – except for London. The political institutions of Downing Street and Westminster are unmistakeable. So too are other London landmarks such as the London Eye, St Paul's and Big Ben. Yet none of the scenes supposedly showing people around the country following the media reports of the Prime Minister are anchored in this place-specific way. Similarly, the appearance of precise historical dating generated by the 'twin towers' reference proves elusive and evaporates upon closer inspection, leaving the film floating in a historical period which seems to exist after history itself has ended. The version of the Yookay perpetuated by *Love Actually* can then be said to be everywhere by being nowhere, to express everyone by expressing no one.[33]

It is striking how often films featuring Hugh Grant's middle-class English buffoon persona follow this pattern. A generic British identity is affirmed through the representation of a middle-class hero, portrayed by Hugh Grant. In each case the fate

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[32] Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* p.205.
[33] I have paraphrased John Barrell here. See his 'Sir Joshua Reynolds and the Englishness of English art' in *Nation and Narration* ed. Homi K. Bhabha, (London: Routledge, 2003), p.163.

of this hero becomes tied up with that of the nation. This embodiment of a putative British national identity is created:

1) by suspending any threat to the narration of that identity which would be posed by figures from the different nations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales; and

2) in contradistinction to an American outsider – usually a woman.

The films follow a linear narrative working towards ideological closure. This takes the form of modulation, between securing a unified ego for the individual viewing subject and his/her resolution within the similarly unified viewing community, the ego-collective. I suggest that this modulation can, following Raymond Williams, be described as a kind of *flow*.

As we have seen, Williams himself used the term flow with three different meanings. Firstly, it referred to the process of editing a cinematic sequence. Later, it was used to describe the sequencing of television programming, with the advantage that it enabled Williams to analyse a whole passage of televisual flow as a planned totality, rather than breaking it down into component units. Finally, the theoretical concept of flow emerged as an analytic technique resembling the Lacanian theory of the gaze. Arising *both* out of the interest in filmic editing *and* out of the analysis of television, Williams was finally able to reach a position where he theorised *flow* as what looks at us, rather than what we look at. This, in effect, is the theory of the gaze.

In other words, *flow* in Williams's sense is important as an analytic concept because it modulates between two properties. These are the twin tendencies of a film to work towards ideological closure *both* within the ego of the viewing subject, *and* within the ego-collective of the viewing community. This enables me to propose a fourth and final extension of Williams's use of the term *flow,* to draw attention to the capacity of films to modulate between the subjective and collective egos in this way.

In each of the films featuring Hugh Grant's middle English buffoon, the buffoon is a kind of modulator, or mediator, figure. Drawing attention to the two properties of cinematic flow enables a dynamic comparative analysis of the films. Flow acts as a kind of modulation. It has the capacity to secure resolution for the ego-collective of the viewing community (on one hand) and of the *individual* ego (on the

other). This modulation brings the films into a relation with each other, and that relation itself can be expressed by the term *flow*.

Williams himself had first developed his theory of the mediator in his study, *Orwell* (1971). He had argued that each of Orwell's novels contains such a figure, who intervenes between Orwell's experience of observing social inequality, and the composition of that experience into a narrative. As with Williams's comments on Freud and Lacan which I explored in Chapter One, the process of *composition* is then the key. The mediator figure in Orwell's work enables experience to be composed into narrative. At the same time, it actually distils and dilutes any really effective social critique and becomes locked into a sense of powerlessness and dispossession. Accordingly, Orwell's mediators can be taken as suggestive literary tropes, but must also be analysed with a kind of scepticism.[34] This is how Williams viewed the mediation between experience and composition that he found in Freud and Lacan. Hugh Grant's middle English buffoon is a similar kind of *mediator*, modulating between identity resolution of the viewing subject at the individual level, and a similar unification at the collective level, within and across each film.

The elision of difference that occurs in *Love Actually* had already been operative in the earlier film, *Notting Hill* (1999). American actress Anna Scott (played by Julia Roberts) comes to London to promote a film. A chance encounter results in her meeting bookshop owner William Thacker. The film simply follows the path of their unfolding relationship. Laura Mulvey points out that the ideological containment of women which we find in mainstream cinema depends on an interplay between identification and misrecognition, where the 'glamorous impersonates the ordinary.'[35] I am arguing that this modulation from one strand of identification to another is typical of filmic *flow* (using Raymond Williams's term) and of the external *gaze* (using Lacan). The poster which was used to publicise *Notting Hill* was a still from one of the iconic moments of the film: ordinary Thacker trudging past a giant poster advertising Anna Scott's latest performance.[36] This is the interplay between glamorous and ordinary of which Mulvey writes.

It is another compensatory phantasy. The American actress earns fourteen million dollars per film, in stark contrast to the struggling Thacker. The film seems to

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[34] See Williams, *Orwell*, (Glasgow: Fontana, 1971), pp.47-48.
[35] Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' p.26.
[36] See Figure Two.

suggest that no matter how powerful the U.S.A. might become relative to Britain, the British middle-class hero is still able to get the American girl. This is a clear example of the theoretical phenomenon explored by Laura Mulvey: the figure of the woman is used to crystallize male desire and anxiety.

Notting Hill enacts a kind of wish-fulfilment: recapitulating Britain's lost strength and unity relative to America. It is interesting that in *Notting Hill,* the achievement of this goal is placed in jeopardy by the character of Thacker's uncouth lodger, Spike – who is Welsh. It is Spike's casual and unreliable attitude that almost results in Thacker not receiving a message from Anna and so threatens to hijack the film's satisfactory denouement. It is as though Welsh difference must be overcome, and be seen to be overcome, if the symbolic unity and power of this imaginary Yookay is to recapitulated. Once the threat posed by Spike is overcome, he is simply left behind in the busy traffic of a London street. He is allowed to play no meaningful part in the film's conclusion.

The threat posed to the narration of British identity, in other words, is held in place by the final suspension of Spike's actions. This is akin to the treatment Laura Mulvey associates with the containment of female power in mainstream cinema. In Mulvey's account, the gaze is always male in the sense that it is a means by which men look at women, suspend feminine power in time and space and so forestall the threat of female strength. Spike suffers in the same way, and yet Spike is a man. How can we explain the contradiction?

In an important rejoinder to Mulvey, published in *Screen* in 1980, Steve Neale questioned the assumption that only female bodies are used as fetish objects in securing a film's ideological conclusion.[37] In Neale's account, the gaze is still identified as male. This time, however, *male* refers less to the process of individual men securing an ideological place for women, and more to the means by which the symbolic order – comprising both men and women – is constructed.[38] In *Notting Hill* the symbolic order is synonymous with a unified collective ego for the United Kingdom. Welsh differential identity would threaten this and is thus frozen by the gaze of the film. The gaze is thus male in Neale's sense that it augments the symbolic order; rather than in Mulvey's sense of men looking at women.

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[37] See Neale, 'Masculinity as Spectacle' in *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality* ed. John Caughie and Annette Kuhn, (London: Routledge, 1992), pp.277-87.
[38] This is also how Julia Kristeva understands the gaze: 'Is not the object-oriented libido always masculine?' See Kristeva, *Desire in Language,* p.264.

Meanwhile, the threat of Scottish otherness to symbolic unity had already been contained in the even earlier film, *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994). Here the main character Charles's Scottish friend Gareth dies and is shut up in a coffin. This symbolically contains the menace that assertion of Scottish otherness would present to the ego-collective of the renascent Yookay, and again allows Charles to go ahead and get the American girl, Carrie. Significantly, the Scottish friend is also a gay man. Again, we can argue that the filmic gaze is male in the sense that it secures resolution for the symbolic order of the ego-collective, and not simply in the sense that it sets up a binary opposition between active men and passive women. The symbolic order of the unitary British state can be characterised as *male* for similar analytic purposes. Although it comprises both men and women, it is male in the sense that it provides resolution to the ego-collective and hence achieves ideological containment of any forces threatening that resolution. The flow of these films modulates between these poles and offers to secure exactly this stable ego-collective for a renascent United Kingdom.

Fracturing the Flow

Jacques Lacan suggested that the gaze is a kind of lure. This is also the point I am trying to make about the filmic *flow*. The mediator figure calls out to an imagined viewer, inviting him or her to feel *direct* personal identification with the metropolitan version of the symbolic order and hence of the nation presented by the film. Yet as Stephen Heath points out, the ideal spectator whom the film purports to address is inevitably never the same as the actually spectating individual.[39]

This point can be made strongly by quoting Raymond Williams again, this time on *Hard Times*. Dickens's novel was produced during a period of rapid social change, which had thrown up huge social divisions within society. *Hard Times* poses every inhabitant of Coketown as somehow identical, so that an imaginative appeal to symbolic unity can be put in place by the novel. As Williams says, 'there is... a Coketowner, who is ideally present before the effective individual versions are introduced.' (*WS*, p.172).

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[39] See Heath, 'Difference' in *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality* ed. John Caughie and Annette Kuhn, (London: Routledge, 1992), pp.93-94.

Moreover, *Hard Times* then also posits an ideal imaginary *reader*, beyond these differences, and reaching for a wider symbolic unity: 'the reader can move, at many critical points, *within* the composed general response of indignation and sympathy. What he should *do*... is left undefined, within the composed response, since specifications would fracture his ideal unity.' (*WS,* p.174).

Thus Williams finds in *Hard Times* a blurring of the boundary between inside and outside the fiction, by modulating between ideal reader and ideal inhabitant, between subjective ego and collective resolution. In other words, *Hard Times* posits the kind of imagined community relating those inside to those outside the fiction that Benedict Anderson considered symptomatic of the way in which national self-imagining occurs. This is the effect of Hugh Grant's mediator figure and of filmic flow. The flow offers to transcend all differences in the creation of an ideal unity, despite the precisely located and different positions of each viewer. Williams draws attention to this much more general process of distilling and diluting difference when he asks, 'Who knows what is Welsh or Wales when all is U.K. or Yookay? Will there be Yookayans yet?' (*WSW?* p.67).

Williams is suspicious of the 'ideal Coketowner,' because he knows that the ideal reader whom the text purports to address is never the same as any individual reader. Each reader is materially situated and approaches the text differently – despite the text's attempt at overriding all difference. Similarly, there is no ideal *Yookayan.* Rather, the range of cultural identities within the British whole is far more diverse than consideration of these films would suggest.

After *Love Actually, Notting Hill* and *Four Weddings and a Funeral,* it is something of a surprise to come to Chris Monger's 1995 film, *The Englishman Who Went Up a Hill but Came Down a Mountain.* Outwardly, there is great similarity between Hugh Grant's character here and his mediator figure in the other films. Grant plays Reginald Anson, a government cartographer, sent to a small Welsh borders community in 1917 to map the terrain. As with the other films, romance is sparked into life between Anson, and his landlady, Elizabeth. This romance is threatened by the wider forces in which the characters are involved, but finally blossoms.

Unlike the other films, however, there is no outside interloper. Or rather, Hugh Grant's middle English buffoon *is* now the interloper in a Welsh non-conformist society. Consequently, the threat of Welsh difference is not suspended from the film's narrative, as we find in *Love Actually* and *Notting Hill.* The buffoon figure is used in

this instance not to repress and override difference, but as a creative tool whereby difference itself can be explored. The flow whereby Hugh Grant's mediator figure modulates between subjective ego and ideal collective is thereby suspended.

I earlier elucidated Raymond Williams's implicit distinction between *phantasy* and *fantasy*, to draw attention to the capacity for the viewer to disbelieve the version of reality presented by the filmic flow. One of the means by which this is possible is to view the three Hugh Grant films I have discussed alongside *The Englishman Who Went Up a Hill but Came Down a Mountain*. The modulating flow of the Hugh Grant mediator operates within and between each of the films *Love Actually, Notting Hill* and *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. Yet the same mediator in *The Englishman* does not achieve the same effect.

In *Preface to Film*, Williams combined an early theory of *flow* with his interest in the history of drama. Arising out of that history, Williams was aware that the whole concept of *character* has a varying history. He says that it 'has acquired certain particular associations, which are the result of historical change rather than anything essential in the dramatic process.' (*PF*, p.9). As an example of this historic variation, Williams points out how the figures of ancient Greek drama cannot really be understood as characters in the same way that those in modern naturalistic drama can. If we apply this sense of how the concept of *character* varies historically to the figure of the charming buffoon, we can see that this figure is not always necessarily as reactionary as my analysis of *Love Actually, Notting Hill* and *Four Weddings and a Funeral* suggests.

Fredric Jameson has noted the temptation to trace the buffoon character across five centuries of European literature, as a continuous symbolic function. He argues that we must resist the temptation to emphasise only continuity, for to do so is to enter into what he calls a *positive hermeneutic*, where the possibility to imagine variation and change would be cancelled. Jameson goes on:

> A negative hermeneutic, then, would on the contrary wish to use the narrative raw material shared by myth and "historical" literatures to sharpen our sense of historical difference, and to stimulate an increasingly vivid apprehension of what happens when plot falls into history, so to speak, and enters the force fields of the modern societies.[40]

[40] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), p.117.

Jameson is interested in a dialectical historical approach that would show how, as societies undergo historical variation, the buffoon figure produced in the literature of those varying societies does not simply recur, but undergoes important modifications. This implies that a consideration of historical change is necessary to tell us why these deviations in function occur. *The Englishman Who Went Up a Hill but Came Down a Mountain* deploys the mediating figure of Hugh Grant's charming buffoon. Yet it does not manage the same ideological closure; it cannot imagine a unified Britain into being. What then is the history into which the plot of this film has fallen, to create such a variation?

The historical context for the film is very much akin to that of the post-devolution Welsh and Scottish novels I analysed in Chapter Four. It is a film that was produced roughly at the moment of devolution, of self- rule in Scotland and Wales, and of what Raymond Williams finally calls 'the break-up of the United Kingdom' (*WSW,* p.186). In that chapter, my argument was that if all nations are imagined communities, then the break-up of the nation is also an imagined process. This enabled me to consider the renegotiation of British peripheral identities that occurs in postmodern and contemporary British writing. I suggested that since the task of fashioning a nation is a large one, it is necessary to present this argument historically, by considering the broadest possible number of novels that participate in this process. Thus I located the 'devolved Frankensteins' written by Malcolm Pryce (in Wales) and Alasdair Gray (in Scotland) in the context of a whole seam of contemporary Welsh and Scottish writing, where the voice of the outsider is used to question the make-up of official culture. A similar point can be made with regard to the films of the same period.

The Englishman Who Went Up a Hill but Came Down a Mountain might seem like a strange choice of film to be invested with qualities of political dissonance and dissent. The quaint tone of rural nostalgia could hardly be said to drive the film towards a strongly oppositional stance with regard to mainstream cinema. It may be the case that whatever oppositional qualities the film does mobilise can only be glimpsed by viewing the film comparatively, alongside the other Hugh Grant English buffoon films, to reveal a fracture in the narrative logic of those filmic flows. In order to see this implicitly oppositional work occurring more explicitly, we have to turn to other films.

Kevin Allen's *Twin Town* (1997) and Justin Kerrigan's *Human Traffic* (1999) are both worlds away from the valleys nostalgia of *The Englishman Who Went Up a Hill but Came Down a Mountain*. These films present a Welsh culture that is urban as opposed to rural; youthful as opposed to stagnant; and cosmopolitan as opposed to inward-looking. By departing from stock notions of Welsh culture in this way, these films participate in the process of exploring Welsh identity as an open-ended question, rather than as an already concluded answer.

Meanwhile, Steve Blandford points out that another Welsh film, Amma Asante's *A Way of Life* (2004), usefully raises the question of 'what constitutes a Welsh film at all.'[41] Asante was raised in London by parents who had emigrated to Britain from West Africa in the 1960s. *A Way of Life* is centred on the murder of a Turkish immigrant to the Welsh valleys. Again, the film departs from stock notions of Welsh identity and does so in a way that complicates any simplistic notion of national identity.

By implicitly raising the question, 'What is a Welsh film?', Asante in effect puts difficult questions to the whole concept of national identity. I have been arguing that this was the logical outcome of Raymond Williams's critique of the unitary British state: it culminates in an implicit critique of the whole idea of nationhood.

The films of Allen, Kerrigan and Asante all undercut out-dated notions of Welshness. This can also be found happening in a series of commercially – and critically – successful films produced in Scotland during the years surrounding devolution. Danny Boyle's *Shallow Grave* (1994), Peter Mullan's *Orphans* (1997) and Lynne Ramsay's *Ratcatcher* (1999) all reject out-dated notions of Scottish culture and identity by providing an ironic critique of those very notions. Moreover, since the break-up of Britain is not restricted to the process of devolution in Scotland and Wales, there are several other kinds of film to undertake this kind of ironic critique. Thus *The Full Monty* (Peter Cattaneo, 1997) and *Billy Elliot* (Stephen Daldry, 2000) assert distinctive regional cultures and identities in contradistinction to the metropolitan culture of England's capital city, while Derek Jarman's 1988 film *The*

[41] Blandford, *Film, Drama and the Break-Up of Britain*, (Pontypridd: University of Glamorgan, 2005), p.36.

Last of England is a sombre meditation on the ways in which advanced capitalism has destroyed vital communities within the metropolis itself.[42]

Similarly, films produced from within specific ethnic and immigrant communities carry out a radical exploration of the meaning of British identity for British Asian populations. Steve Blandford suggests that Gurhinder Chadra's films *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993), *Bend it Like Beckham* (2002), and *Bride and Prejudice* (2004) 'have all taken totemic icons of Englishness and used them as the basis for a comic exploration of their meaning for British Asian identity.'[43] The 2002 film, *Dirty Pretty Things* directed by Stephen Frears tells the story of a group of illegal immigrants in London, and thereby opens up the cinematic record to a group of people who officially do not exist, yet without whom the British economy, the lynchpin on which metropolitan and imperial British culture had been founded, could not operate.

All of these films, on their different terrains, carry out the renegotiation of British identity that I explored throughout Chapter Four, and contribute in their own ways to the imaginative break-up of the British union. The filmic flow of an imagined ideal viewing community is fractured by the making and viewing of these films, which all put deeper questions to the unitary British state. Raymond Williams himself had tried to perform this important imaginative work in his novels, and actively raised the deeper political and ideological questions in his non-fiction. Williams showed profound early insight into the processes of symbolic and political break-up that are now beginning to accelerate. Accordingly, Williams is a major figure in our understanding of the contemporary cultures of post-imperial Britain.

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[42] I owe my discovery of the Jarman film to Robert Hewison's *Future Tense: A New Art For The Nineties,* (London: Methuen, 1990), p.75.
[43] Blandford, *Film, Drama and the Break-Up of Britain*, p.39.

Conclusion: Postmodern Williams?

> 'The break-up of the United Kingdom', some people say, their voices almost cracking with real or rehearsed emotion. But take this 'United Kingdom'. I know it is officially called that, in the language of draftsmen and diplomats, and there is a kind of administrative and commercial shorthand in which it is reduced to 'UK', in the way that some people say 'HQ'. But very few of us who live on this island think of it, first, as the 'United Kingdom.'[1]

I have argued over the previous five chapters that Raymond Williams actively worked to establish devolution in Wales and hence bring about the break-up of the British union. I showed in Chapters Two and Four that his own novels imagined that break-up into existence at least eighteen years before devolution was realised in 1997. The fact that Williams did not survive to witness the moment of devolution in no way lessens the impact of his work in this area. On the contrary, Williams was an early entrant into the devolution arena. He foresaw that as a process, devolution would be complex and lengthy rather than established once and for all time. Indeed, I argued in Chapter Four that the process itself is still only gradually being worked out. The result of this is that, due to his insight into that complex procedure, Williams is a major figure in our understanding of contemporary postcolonial cultures within Britain.

The same is true to some extent with a critical theory of postmodern culture. I showed in Chapter Five that the work on television for which Williams is rightly known has eclipsed the much earlier and less well-known work on film, in which the key concepts of the later work on television had actually been worked out. We know from the work of Baudrillard, Lyotard and Jameson that the cultural analysis of both film and television is pertinent to a critical understanding of postmodern cultural production. Despite his characteristic lack of explicit engagement with the work of these contemporaries, Williams can then be said to have been moving towards a critical theory of postmodern culture throughout his career.

Thus I take a somewhat different approach to the work of Williams from that of Dennis Dworkin. Dworkin claims that within a decade of his death, Williams's old-fashioned socialism meant that he had 'already' become part of a 'different political age.'[2] I have argued that the age in which Williams's critical thinking is most apposite was not his own, but is ours. Over the course of the twenty years or so since Williams's death, the currents in which he was sailing have become stronger.

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[1] Williams, 'Are We Becoming More Divided?' in *WSW*, p.186.
[2] See Dworkin, *Views Beyond the Border Country: Raymond Williams and Cultural Politics*, (New York: Routledge, 1993), p.51.

Williams's latent interests in the break-up of Britain on one hand, and in a critical response to postmodern cultural forms, on the other, have gathered momentum in much varied work since his death. The underlying issues have come out into the open and become clearer. The result of this is a kind of causal belatedness. Williams is a relevant figure in our understanding of contemporary literary cultures in Britain – and beyond – precisely because of his old-fashionedness. His work is causally belated in the sense that it had anticipated certain developments in contemporary cultural politics which are only now becoming evident.

The Break-Up of Britain and the postmodern turn.[3] These are the directions in which Williams was moving at the time of his death. What then is the relationship between them?

The Postmodern Turn

It is possible to date the point at which Raymond Williams took the postmodern turn with some exactitude. There were general currents in his work throughout the last decade of his life: the relationship between culture and technology; the general preponderance of the *image* over the *word*; and the realignment of values that had begun to occur within a new global political and economic system. These were rendered more pressing by one historical event - the Falklands War, in 1982.

To Williams, the Falklands/ Malvinas War had the ontological status of a media-managed spectacle. It was covered in detail on television, radio and in print media. This had the effect of reducing the violence and danger of conflict into a series of carefully orchestrated images that were depthless, and behind which the viewer/ reader could not hope to peek. The conflict itself was distanced to the other side of the globe and media coverage of the event therefore rendered it strangely unreal, reduced to the status of a game, with surprisingly little sense of urgency or danger.

It was in the dimension of political decision that Williams took the greatest exception to the war. The Thatcher government had spent the first two or three years of its administration bombarding Britain with what Williams calls an 'anti-state

[3] *The Postmodern Turn* was the title of a study of contemporary literary form published by Ihab Hassan in the U.S.A. in 1987, shortly before the death of Raymond Williams. See Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987).

rhetoric' in matters of social welfare and public spending. This was suddenly combined with an aggressive 'pro-state rhetoric' in the sphere of policing at home and military sanction overseas.[4] There followed a quite different kind of bombardment. The signals being given off by the political machinery of government were contradictory, overloaded, difficult to discern.

According to Stuart Hall, the Falklands War was a period of *authoritarian populism*, characterised by flag waving, cheering and jingoism in support of British troops defending Britain's interests overseas.[5] This careful orchestration of spectacle enabled a narrow version of the national interest to eviscerate the core of Britain's public space, and occupy that space with the rhetoric and images of the militarised capitalist economy. This was true right down to the name in which the military invasion was carried out: the 'United Kingdom.' The management of media spectacle took to an extreme form all the appeals to a dubious version of national unity that had characterised the worst excesses of the imperial period. As Williams writes in 'The Culture of Nations', 'the Yookay of course is neither historical nor cultural; it is a jargon term of commercial and military planning.' (*T2000*, p.193).

Perplexed by the combination of pro-state rhetoric in military aggression with anti-state rhetoric in matters of social welfare, Williams simply could not reconcile the versions of British identity he saw perpetuated in media reports during the Falklands episode with his own, less superficial, understanding of Britain. In an article entitled 'Problems of the Coming Period' subsequently collected in *Resources of Hope,* he addresses this difficulty:

> It is not because the British people are excessively nationalist and self-confident that you got the absurd jingoism of the Falklands episode. The kind of spectacular consumerist militarism which that episode was – with all the guns going off eight thousand miles away, thus with war reduced, for all but the unfortunate people who were sent there, to television screens, rhetoric, flags and so on – simply cannot be defined with other versions of nationalism, let alone of national identity. It is in absence and distance that this kind of artificial and superficial image of the nation can be generated and temporarily adopted. (*RH*, p.164).

It was during the Falklands War that three key areas of interest in Williams's thinking began to line up. The interest in what Fredric Jameson has called the 'technological sublime' could hardly be clearer than in this concern with the consumerist militarism

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[4] Williams, 'The Culture of Nations' in *Towards 2000*, p.191.
[5] Quoted in John Eldridge and Lizzie Eldridge, *Raymond Williams: Making Connections*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p.84.

of armed conflict.[6] The subliminal properties of this technological warfare are in turn enhanced by the aura of remoteness which accompanies them. The militarism is consumerist and technological, while at the same time being safely distanced to a location several thousand miles away. The culture of using distance and space in this way intersects with the relationship between culture and technology. The consumerist militarism of the Falklands War was created through the interactive use of technology and of distance. The technological forms by which the war was relayed home were then rendered all the more sublime by the distance from which they were relayed.

This dynamic is then an important feature of Williams's critique of postmodern culture more generally. For not only modern warfare and the apparatus of modern travel, but also the technologies of cinema, television, photography and later, the internet, are remote and distant in the sense that very few people have real access to the use of them in cultural production. These technologies often mobilise very powerful images which are depthless, lacking a sense of historical complexity. In Williams's writing on the Falklands War there is an important nexus of ideas connecting culture, technology, the global system and the image society. These theoretical concerns are then not only components of Williams's commentary on the war itself, but are also general features of the critique of postmodern culture towards which he was moving at the time of his death.

This can be seen by considering the two different sets of images with which the British media were bombarded during the period. Alongside the depthless images of bombs and explosions occurring thousands of miles away, there was also a saturation of images of cheering crowds waving flags and singing patriotic songs, waiting to welcome the troops back home. As we have seen, Williams did not think that it was down to excessive jingoism among the general public that this was the case. Rather, it was because the public space had been occupied by a capitalist and militaristic rhetoric which made effective dissent almost impossible. Williams's critique of postmodern cultural forms is therefore also an important critique of a manufactured and exploitable version of national identity.

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[6] Kevin Kavanagh discusses the relationship of Jameson's work to that of Williams in his 'Against the New Conformists: Williams, Jameson and the Challenge of Postmodernity' in *Raymond Williams Now: Knowledge, Limits and the Future* ed. Jeff Wallace, Rod Jones, and Sophie Nield, (London: MacMillan, 1997), pp.145-62.

Thus when he looked back on the war almost three years later, it was this exploitable nationalism, rather than the society of the image and of the spectacle as such, that Williams drew attention to. He told Philip Cooke in an interview in 1984:

> [i]t is important to make a distinction about nationalism in the context of the unitary British state. There are two kinds of nationalism. There is that nationalism which reinforces the idea of the traditional nation-state. This nationalism has been given added impetus under the Thatcher governments as we saw at the time of the Falklands/ Malvinas episode....
> The other kind of nationalism is that which questions the whole basis of the unitary British state. (*RH*, p.238).

I explored Williams's contrasting ways of understanding nationalism in Chapter Four. He used the essay 'Are We Becoming More Divided?' to think through this relationship between a pan-British nationalism and alternative nationalisms which question the whole unitary basis of the British state. Moreover, I showed in Chapter Two that it was through the experience of Welsh cultural politics and the development of an emergent Welsh consciousness that Williams was able to develop some of his most important critical insights. These in turn became more generally applicable as part of the process of questioning the unitary make-up of the British state. Thus Williams concludes the interview with Philip Cooke by stating, 'I think that the first kind of nationalism is reactionary and that the second is progressive.' (*RH*, p.238). A pan-British nationalism would uphold the centralised state and hence support the military-industrial complex of capitalist society. An alternative nationalism would question the construction of that state and so question also that complex. In another interview in 1987, Williams told Terry Eagleton:

> This experience of ambiguity and contradiction hasn't only equipped us in Wales to understand our own situation better; it's also equipped us, emotionally and intellectually, to understand the situation of increasing numbers of people – including the once so self-assured, confident English. It's easier for us, in other words, to put questions to these simple, confident, unitary identities which really belong to an earlier historical period. (*RH*, p.320).

The earlier historical period which Williams mentions here is the period I traced out in Chapter Four. It is that evolutionary period from *early modern* to *modern* in which the nation-state in its centralistic, unitary, and bureaucratic guise began to emerge. The unitary version of national identity was thoroughly imbued with the spirit of

modernity and of capitalism. To suggest that such versions of identity really belong to an earlier period is to suggest that the moment of cultural modernity has become obsolescent. If the unitary nation-state belongs to the moment of cultural modernity, the question this raises is: What happens to that state when the relations on which it depends have undergone historical transformation? What comes after the modern?

After Britain

Raymond Williams was fascinated by the experience of modernity, to the extent that it dominated much of his critical thinking. Indeed, in my resuscitation of Williams, it goes on dominating his thinking. For Williams can be read as a postmodern thinker only if we understand the concept of the postmodern, not as simply *coming after* modernity, but actually being rooted *in* it. If the forming of nation-states was an important element of the experience of modernity, then to enter into a new historical period, and to register the experience of modernity in different ways, also requires that new forms of relationship be thought out to enable an understanding of that experience. To Williams, this is explicitly related to the break-up of the nation-state. It is only because Williams the modernist has begun to fail us that postmodern Williams has been able to take the stage.[7] That is, the critical concepts developed by Williams help us to understand the cultural logic of postmodern cultural production.

Much of Williams's writing was produced for specific occasions. I suggested in Chapter Three that Williams used the occasion of his formal retirement from university academia to propound a detailed critique of the imperial dimension behind Britain's university system. This had been an interest throughout his career. Similarly, I showed in Chapter Two that the campaign for Welsh devolution was central to Williams's development of more generally applicable theoretical concepts. If Williams's unapologetic socialist commitments have come to seem outmoded, this is itself the result of certain political defeats, and above all, the collapse of organized socialism in the face of a new global narrative of capital.

Yet those defeats in no way mitigate the impulses and insights of the original work. The project of devolution in Scotland and Wales again makes this point neatly.

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[7] I am paraphrasing Edward Said here. See his *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, (London: Granta, 1996), xiv.

The fact of referendum defeat in 1979 did not cause Williams to flinch from his belief in the rightness of the cause, as that cause was linked to a broader socialist politics. The devolution period of the 1970s had been the occasion for Williams to develop some of the best-known concepts in his thinking: *dominant, emergent* and *residual*, and the revised formula of *base* and *superstructure*. The passing of the specific moment for which those concepts were developed does not render the concepts themselves less valuable for the insights they provide into cultural processes. Thus when devolution was finally realised nine years after Williams's death, in a certain sense, Williams *was* actually present – in the sense that his application of *dominant, emergent* and *residual* forms to the process of devolution had finally come to fruition.

Those theoretical concepts are not commonly associated uniquely with Welsh devolution. On the contrary, they are usually taken as much more generally applicable terms for cultural analysis. I showed in Chapter Two that the concepts of *dominant, emergent* and *residual* cultural forms had actually been developed in 1977-78, at a precise moment when Williams was actively campaigning for Welsh self-government. Thus, not only do those concepts help us understand the recent political history of Wales. It is also true that that history is a necessary element in our understanding of how Williams developed the concepts. This underlines the dialectical relationship between kinds of writing and historical processes by which Williams characterises cultural materialism.

My analysis has depended upon a dynamic interplay between synchronic and diachronic conceptions of time. The advantage of this is that I have been able to draw attention to the relative shift from modernism to the postmodern, and from formation of the British union to the break-up of the unitary state. The advantage of maintaining a sense of these two different temporalities is that it enables me to generate a sense of continuity with variation. This was perhaps most clearly the case in analysis of the post-*Frankenstein* novels, *Poor Things* and *Last Tango in Aberystwyth*, in Scotland and Wales, in Chapter Four.

I have stressed throughout, however, that the imaginative break-up of the union is not simply a literary history of devolution. It also registers the break-down of national consensus and belonging along several other sets of coordinates. Without this sense of different terrains, it would be impossible to account for the imaginary break-down of that unitary identity from within the metropolitan centre, which is at work in the fiction of writers as diverse as A.S. Byatt, Kazuo Ishiguro, and Salman Rushdie.

The fact that these writers do undertake a fictional critique of the unitary state from its very centre underlines the extent to which the break-up of Britain includes, but is not limited to, the process of devolution in Scotland and Wales.

The danger in suggesting otherwise would be that it would invoke a linear history and strictly teleological mode of temporality where, implicitly, *devolution* would become synonymous with *postmodernism* in a manner that would leave England itself trailing in its wake. By emphasising the non-synchronous aspect of postmodern literary creation I have avoided this distorted position. The break-up of the nation-state is an imaginary event which occurs on a number of different conceptual terrains. Thus postmodernist fiction throws up an opportunity for explorations of the concept of Englishness quite as much as it offers the post-devolution nations of Britain an opportunity to develop their own voices.

It was an interest in the voice that first led Raymond Williams to relate his own materialist practice to historical semiotics, via the emergent polyphonic voices of drama in Scandinavia and the Celtic periphery. The metaphor of a new nation finding its voice is something of a commonplace in postcolonial literatures. It is mobilised to strong effect in Ngugi wa Thiongo'o's novel, *A Grain of Wheat.* In Chapter Four I suggested a parallel between the work of Raymond Williams and that of Ngugi. That suggestion was part of a general argument relating the formation of the unitary British state to the formation of an empire overseas. By implication, it also related the break-up of that empire to the break-up of the British union. This is roughly the argument presented by Tom Nairn in *The Break-Up of Britain*, a text whose influence can be discerned throughout all of the preceding five chapters.

In a more recent study entitled *After Britain,* Nairn sought to recapitulate some of the important themes of *The Break-Up of Britain*, from the vantage point of a moment in which devolution had finally begun to occur in Scotland. It is striking that in *After Britain*, Nairn, like Williams, employs the metaphor of the national discovery of voice: 'In sovereignty questions, voice is all, or at least the source of all.'[8] This metaphor is then also, as with Williams, peculiarly literal in the sense that Scotland is beginning to discover the real, political means by which to speak to and for itself.

Nairn's argument in *After Britain* is a complex synthesis of politics, cultural history and social theory. He suggests that the emerging situations in Scotland, and

[8] Nairn, *After Britain: New Labour and the Return of Scotland*, (London: Granta, 2001), p.137.

(though he does not analyse it in much detail) Wales, both *are* and *are not* postcolonial phenomena. This takes Nairn, like Raymond Williams, into a detailed reading of the history of the unitary British state.

To Nairn, the key date was 1707, the year of the Act of Union between England and Scotland. The important point he makes is this: that the treaty of union was one concluded between two already constituted sovereign states. It was not envisaged as the means of domination of one state by another. What happened historically, the centralisation of political and economic power in London, and the hegemonic control of Scotland and Wales as satellite states, was explicitly not the point of the original Act of Union. Thus Nairn suggests, 'Scots have largely supported the Union, more consciously and deliberately than the English – but have also read its meaning differently.'[9] When the Scottish Parliament voted itself out of existence in 1707 it was on the basis of assumed entry into a new partnership of equality. What happened instead was the gradual incursion of the exercise of economic and political power from the metropolitan centre. This incursion of the centralised state 'depended completely upon the absence of voice in its satellites.'[10] Or, as Nairn argues in more detail, the 1707 Act was a compromise between members of Scotland's ruling class with its English counterparts, whereby the Scottish ruling class felt that it could gain more by throwing in its lot with London, and leave Scotland itself in effect without a political voice:

> The vocal cords were not excised by 1707, but they were re-routed via the class structure to the Westminster modem, and translated into Unitarist-speak. A Scoto-British idiom emerged out of the process – that odd tongue which the Labour party in Scotland is still struggling to rediscover and articulate.[11]

From within ruling-class London, the Act of Union very quickly became converted into an instrument of domination and control. 'But,' writes Nairn, 'the point has never been taken in quite the same way in the satellites themselves.'[12] In Scotland, and to some extent in Wales, union was imagined as precisely that - the equal partnership of members working together. This was only the case since Scotland at least was already

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[9] Nairn, *After Britain*, p.213.
[10] Nairn, *After Britain*, p.134.
[11] Nairn, *After Britain*, p.137.
[12] Nairn, *After Britain*, p.135.

a fully constituted nation prior to 1707. In other words, it could never be completely incorporated to an English empire or to a pan-British state, since it already had its own anterior self-identity:

> in Scotland, there was no 'nation' to be built, redeemed, 'imagined' (etc.) by means of the usual formulae. The nation was there already. It had never gone away, or been repressed, liquidated or assimilated. These fates had overtaken the state part of it alone. Also, the rest had been around as long as England...[13]

Nairn dismisses the stock notions of *building* or *redeeming* the nation. At the same time, he also dismisses Benedict Anderson's quite different notion of the *imagined community*. Nairn's enthusiasm for the anterior history of the Scottish nation causes him to over-emphasise the pre-existent nature of Scotland's national self-definition, as if this in itself had always existed, without having to be actively generated at some point in history. When Anderson coined the term, *imagined community*, he used it simply to refer to this process of fashioning a national order, which Nairn dismisses.

This is odd because much of the argument in *After Britain* rests on a strong sense of the historical means by which the nation is always imagined into being. The argument is that Britain at the end of the twentieth century was at the very final stage of its imperial period. The Falklands War and the return of Chinese sovereignty to Hong Kong were both colonial moments. The fact that the latter was presided over by Prime Minister Tony Blair suggests to Nairn that Blair himself should be seen as the last of Britain's imperial leaders. His administration was dominated by large public spectacles: the Hong Kong affair; Princess Diana's funeral; the construction of the Millennium Dome in London. All of these, Nairn argues, sought to resuscitate Britain's sense of strength and efficiency on the world stage. They all demonstrated Britain's capacity to put on a show:

> Ukanian Sovereignty was... a story – a great public outwork of narrative collectively erected upon the foundations of English nationalism, in the course of the latter's subsequent adventures and travails in the wider world. But as the world has changed, that narrative has grown obsolescent. It has been retold too often, and instead of trying forever to upgrade it

[13] Nairn, *After Britain*, p.140.

> with ingenious twists and turns, a new start to sovereignty would be better: better for the periphery, but also (in the long run) better for England itself.[14]

Nairn's *Ukania* recalls Williams's *Yookay*. The comparison suggests that despite Nairn's assertion of a pre-existing fully constituted Scottish nation, the nation does have to be imagined, after all. This is the faultline in Nairn's work. The nation when understood as the *British* state only exists because it has been imagined into being by a few devious operatives working for their own pernicious ends. On the other hand, Nairn seems to suggest that the Scottish nation somehow pre-dates the precise means of representation.

The over-privileging of Scottish history which we find in Nairn's work is not only rhetorically excessive; it is also theoretically weak. This is in contrast to the work of Raymond Williams, where I have shown that the continual emphasis is not on the over-privileging of alternative nationalisms in Scotland or Wales. Rather, it is on emphasising the different ways in which the unitary state has now to be superseded.

Williams understands the future of the British states in the same way that Nairn discusses Scotland's relation to England: as a willing co-operation between equal partners, where each member is fully and freely able to define, represent and speak for itself. He writes:

> unless in one way or another people can get effective positive control of their own places and their own lives, this complex industrial society will smash itself up, with increasing hatred and bitterness, not in spite of but because of the imposed and artificial unity which the existing system is fighting to maintain... Once you are not controlled, in advance and systematically, by others, you soon discover the kinds of co-operation, between nations, between regions, between communities, on which any full life depends. But it is then your willing and not your enforced co-operation. That is why I, with many others, now want and work to divide, as a way of declaring our own interests, certainly, but also as a way of finding new and willing forms of co-operation: the only kind of co-operation that any free people can call unity. ('Are We Becoming More Divided?' *WSW*, pp.189-90).

Williams, like Nairn, sees some kind of union continuing to exist in the British Isles. At the same time, he, like Nairn, believes that the current unitary system is outmoded, historically obsolete, and in need of reform. There needs to be some kind of direct self-rule at every possible level. At the same time, neither Williams nor Nairn envisages the utter fragmentation of the union when considered as a partnership. Break-up, we might say, but not break-away.

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[14] Nairn, *After Britain*, p.191.

What an account of Nairn's *After Britain* most usefully adds to our understanding of Raymond Williams is the implication that contemporary British cultures should be considered from a post-imperial – if not a postcolonial – perspective. The difference is slight, but it is not just semantic. The distinction refers to the need expounded by both writers for the central and unitary system to be superseded by more democratic forms at various different levels, which will nevertheless continue to interact in partnership. Britain is not a postcolonial nation like Kenya or India. Yet recent British history is a post-imperial history. Only by confronting the fact that the unity of the United Kingdom was elaborated during the imperial period will it become possible to supersede this construct and enable new forms of self-definition at all of the effective levels within British society.

I have argued that Raymond Williams drew attention to the many different ways in which that might happen: in the domains of peripheral nationhood, gender, class and race. Nairn by contrast over-privileges one case, the Scottish example. He loses track of how the nation-state – whether conceived as Britain, Scotland, or what may be - has *always* to be elaborated. That is, there can be no concept of the nation without recourse to the material means by which a community constitutes itself as a nation. There can be no nation without narration.

We know from Tom Nairn's earlier work on *The Break-Up of Britain* that the formation of nation-states was part of the process of the global spread of capitalist society. In its later stages, this process has become so accelerated that it has become fully transnational in scope, capable of overriding national parameters. Thus I argued in Chapters One and Three that Raymond Williams's commitment to finding socialist political formations followed a trajectory *away* from the nation-state, and towards analysis of transnational capital.

Williams's political campaigning and his own novels each participated in this process of freeing *people* from *state* at least two decades before it emerged into the open, in the referenda of 1997. In the final analysis, we can submit Williams to a rigorous historical critique of his own methods by using the vocabulary which he himself developed. In working towards cultural and political processes twenty years before they would become widespread, Williams represented the *pre-emergent* stage of a now general tendency towards political break-up. Williams's work on cultural materialism, in other words, anticipated the symbolic break-up of Britain that is only now occurring.

Figure One: Natalie and the Tea Tray. From *Love Actually* (2003).

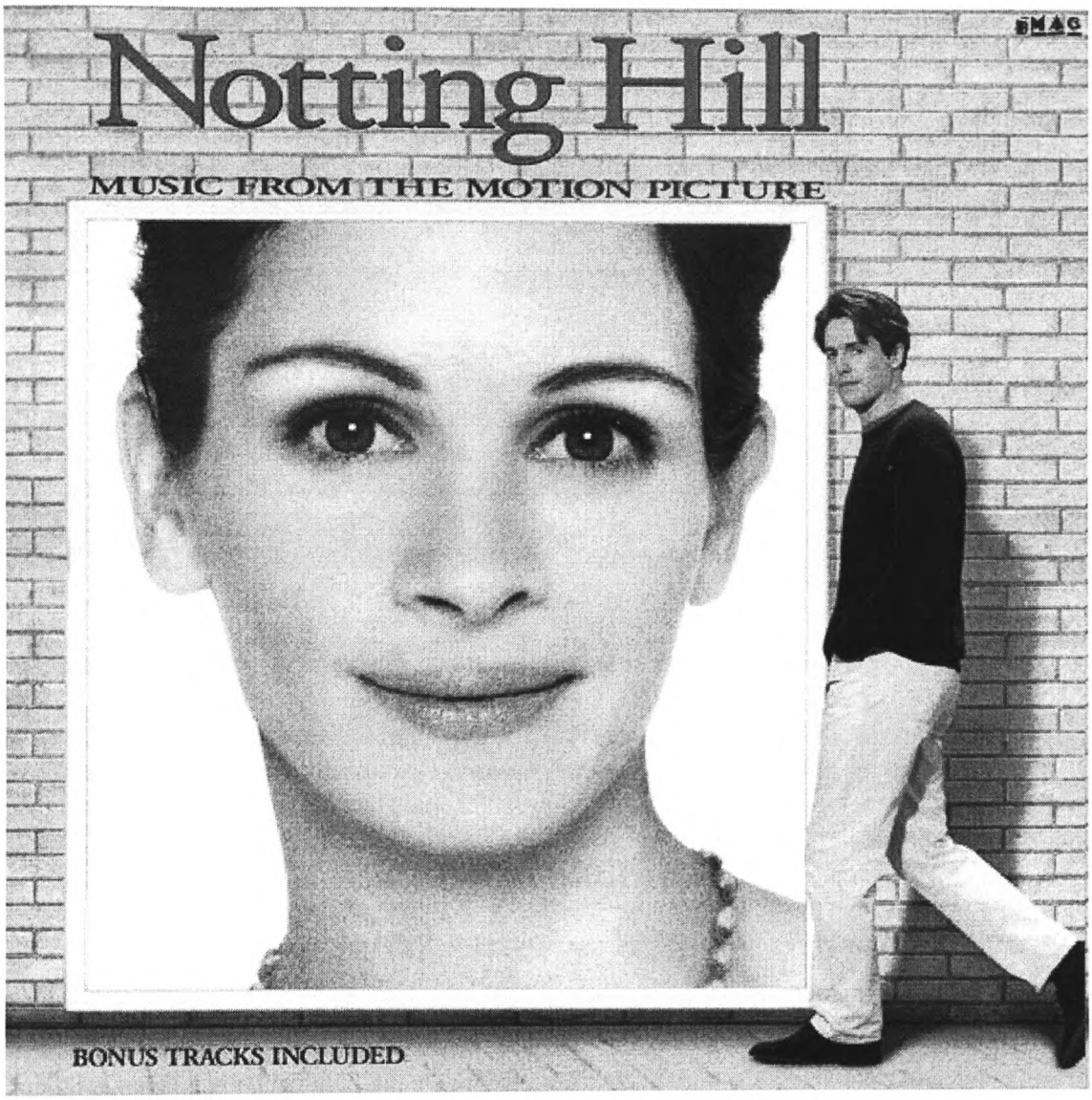

Figure Two: Hugh Grant and Julia Roberts. Promotional poster for *Notting Hill* (1999). The glamorous impersonates the ordinary.

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